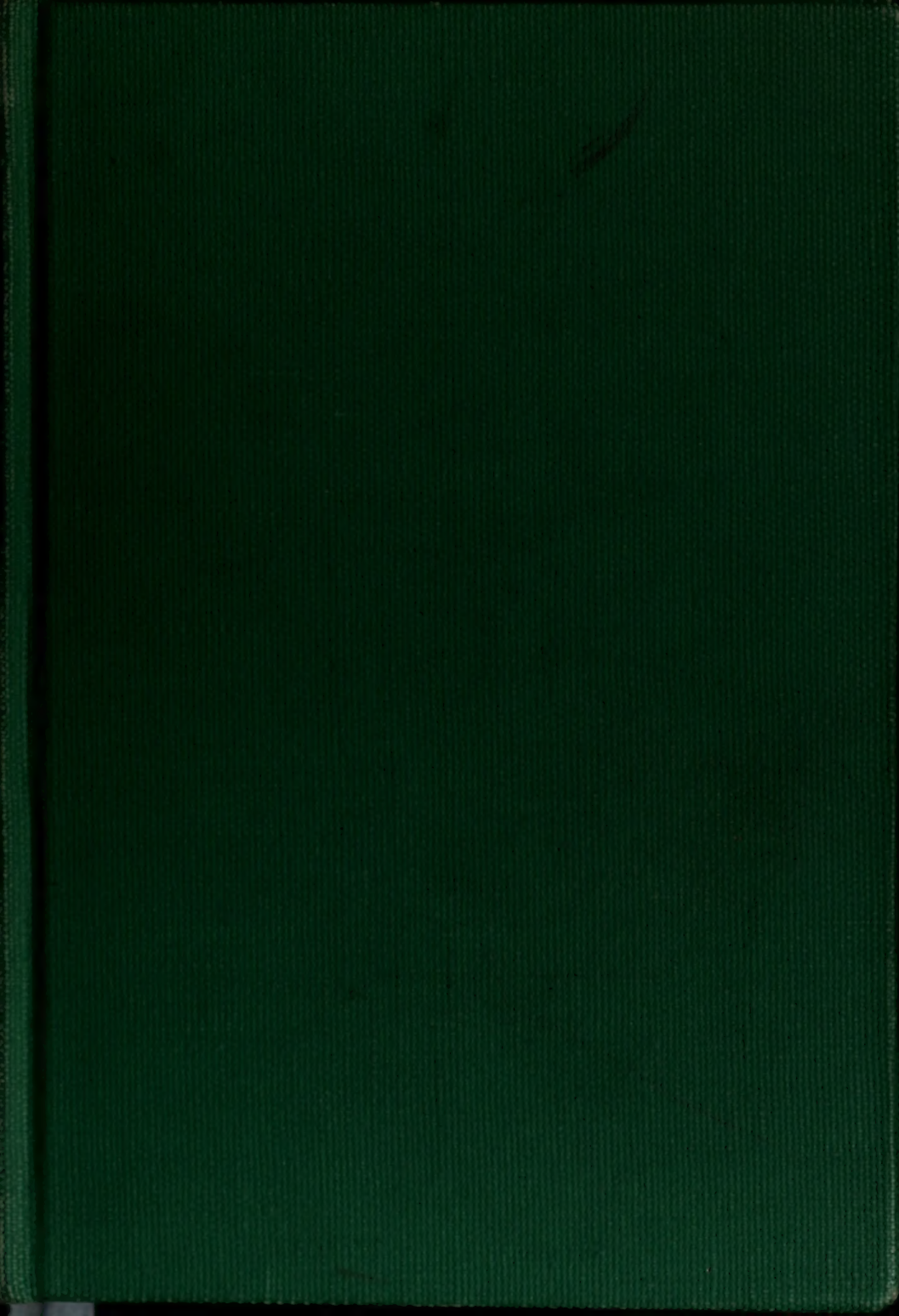




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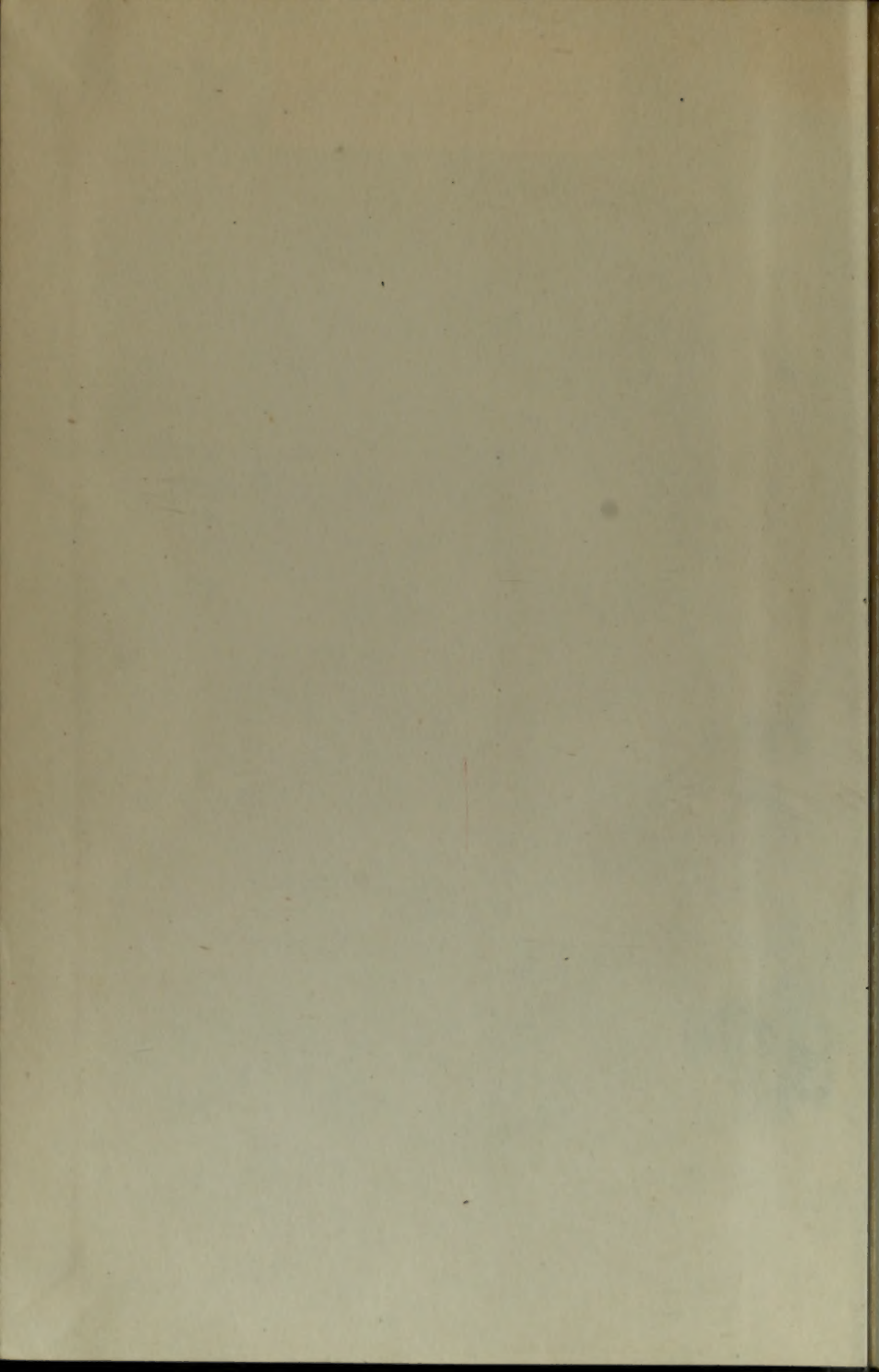
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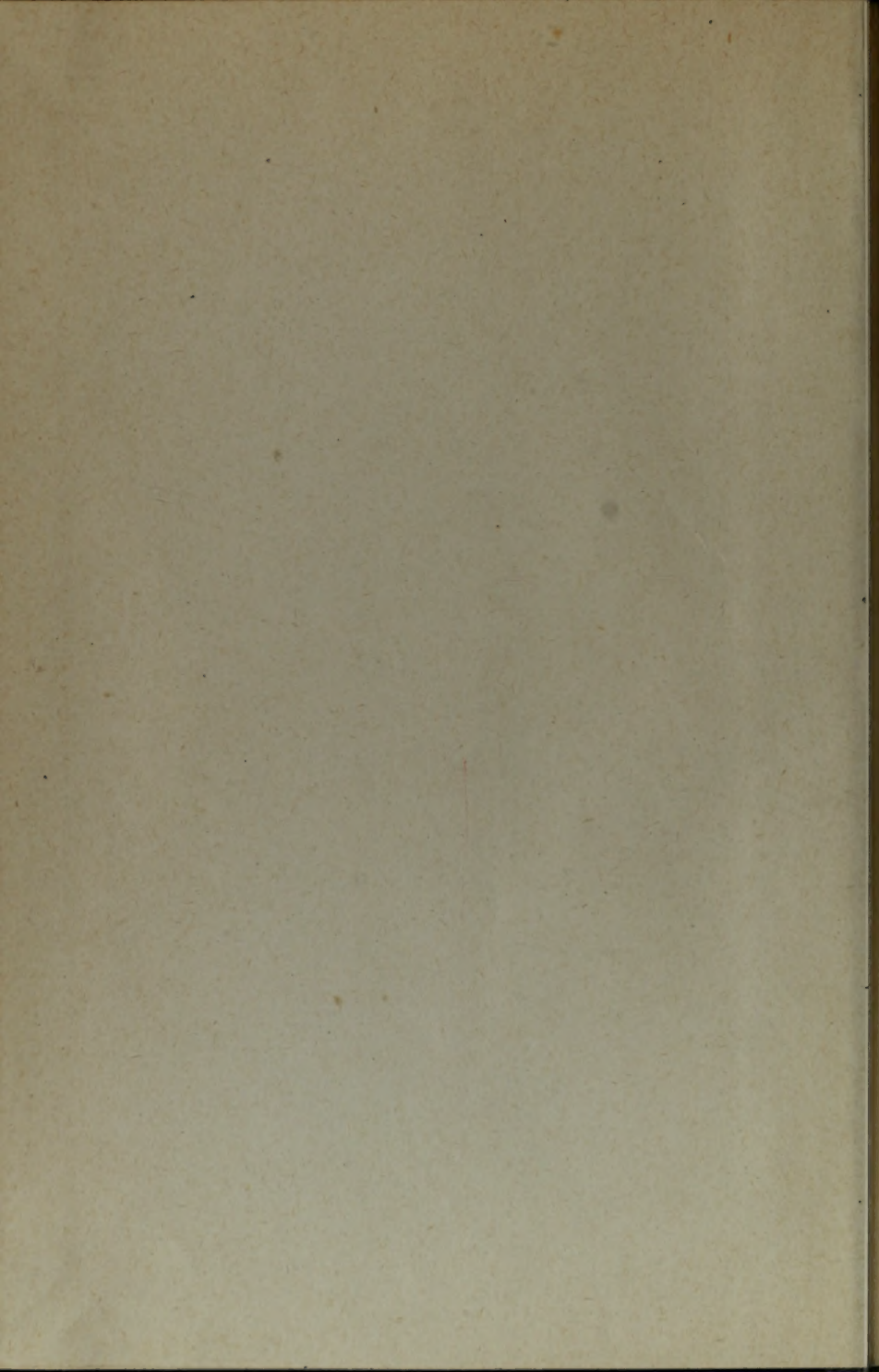
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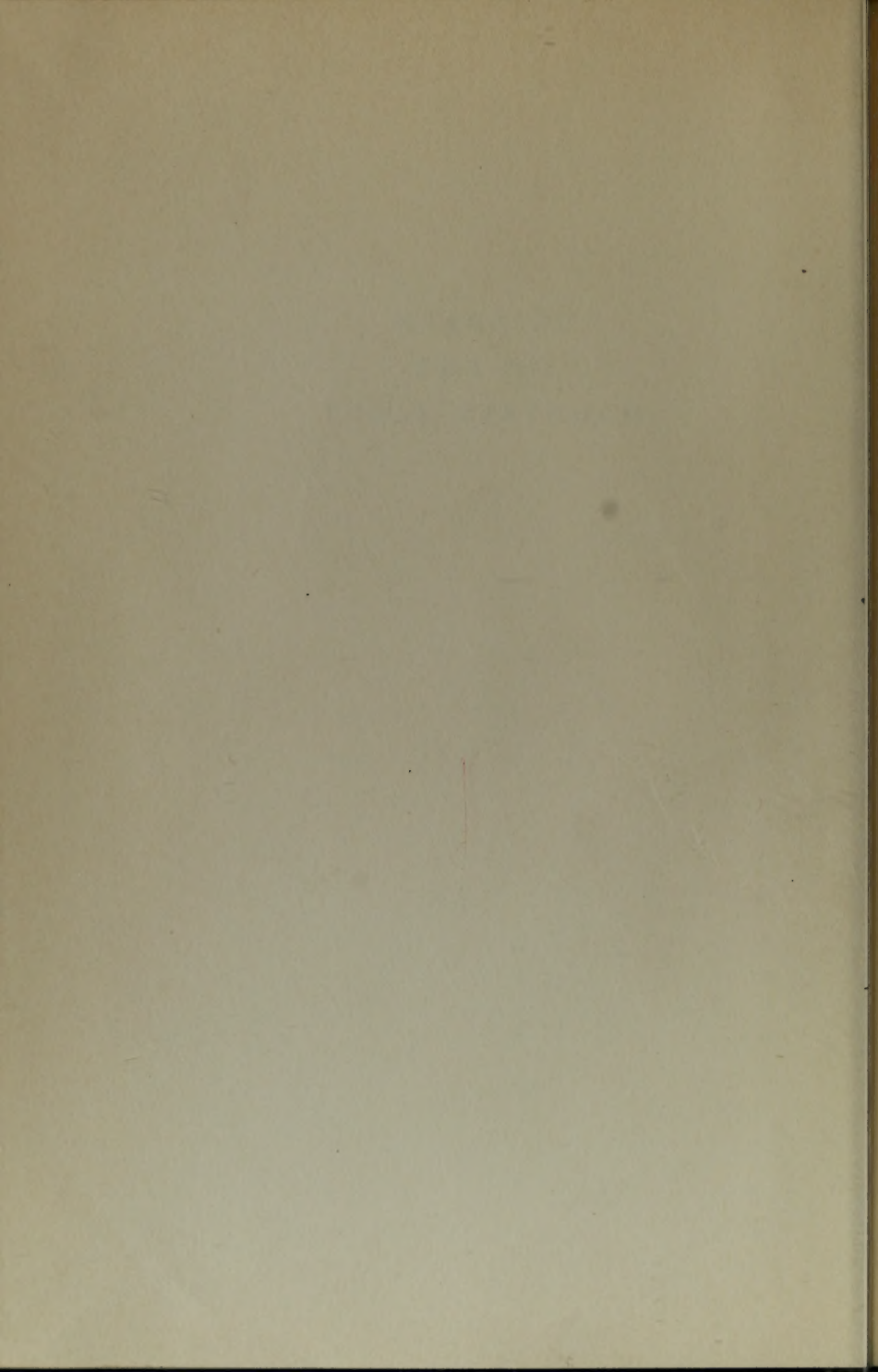
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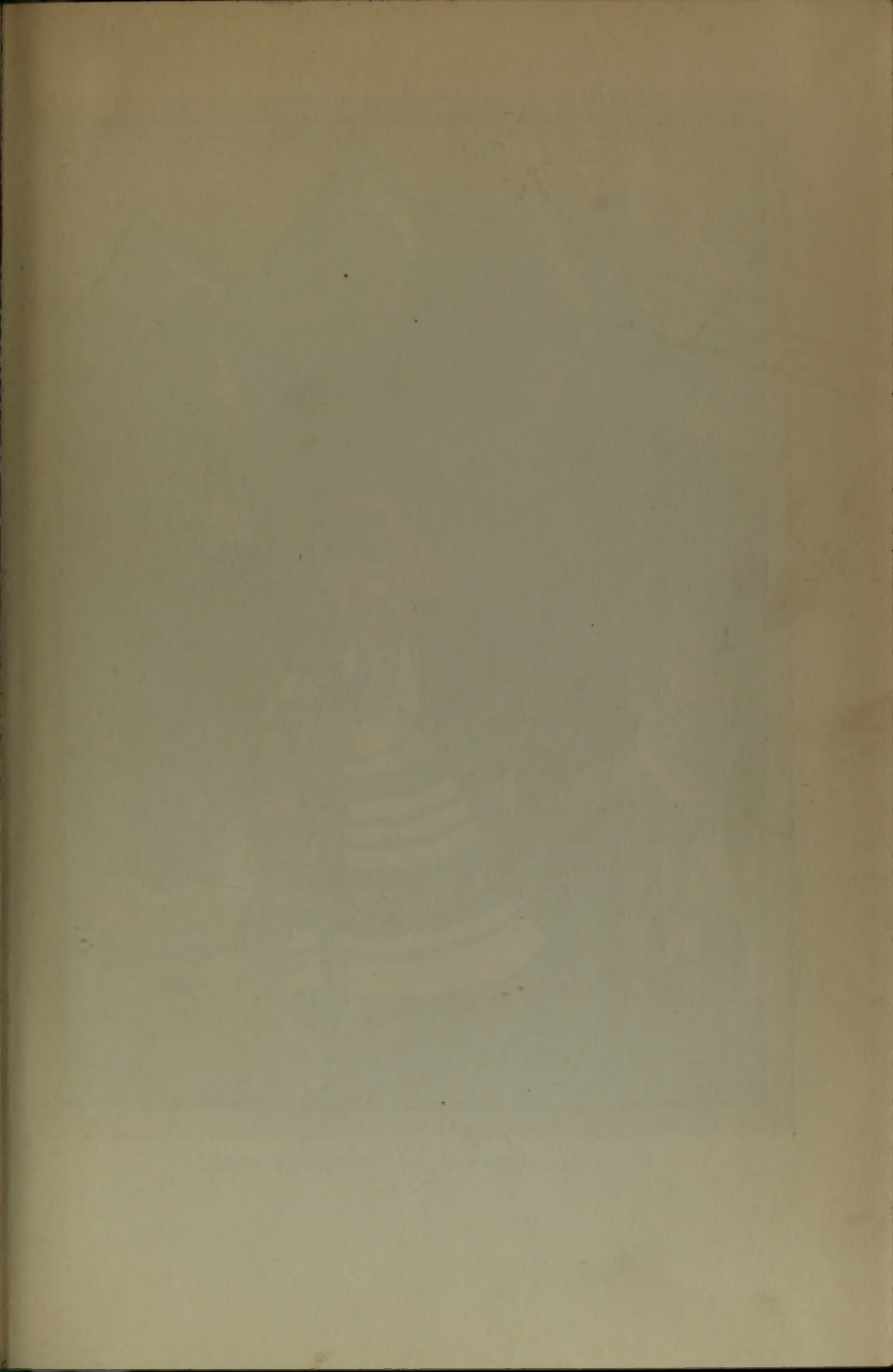
WITHDRAWN





CHILDREN
OF THE
MOUNTAIN EAGLE







"SHEPHERD'S MUSIC," THOUGHT BOR

CHILDREN
OF THE
MOUNTAIN EAGLE

by

ELIZABETH
CLEVELAND
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by

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DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

1927

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FIRST EDITION

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TO THE REAL
BOR AND MARASH

Drawer 679



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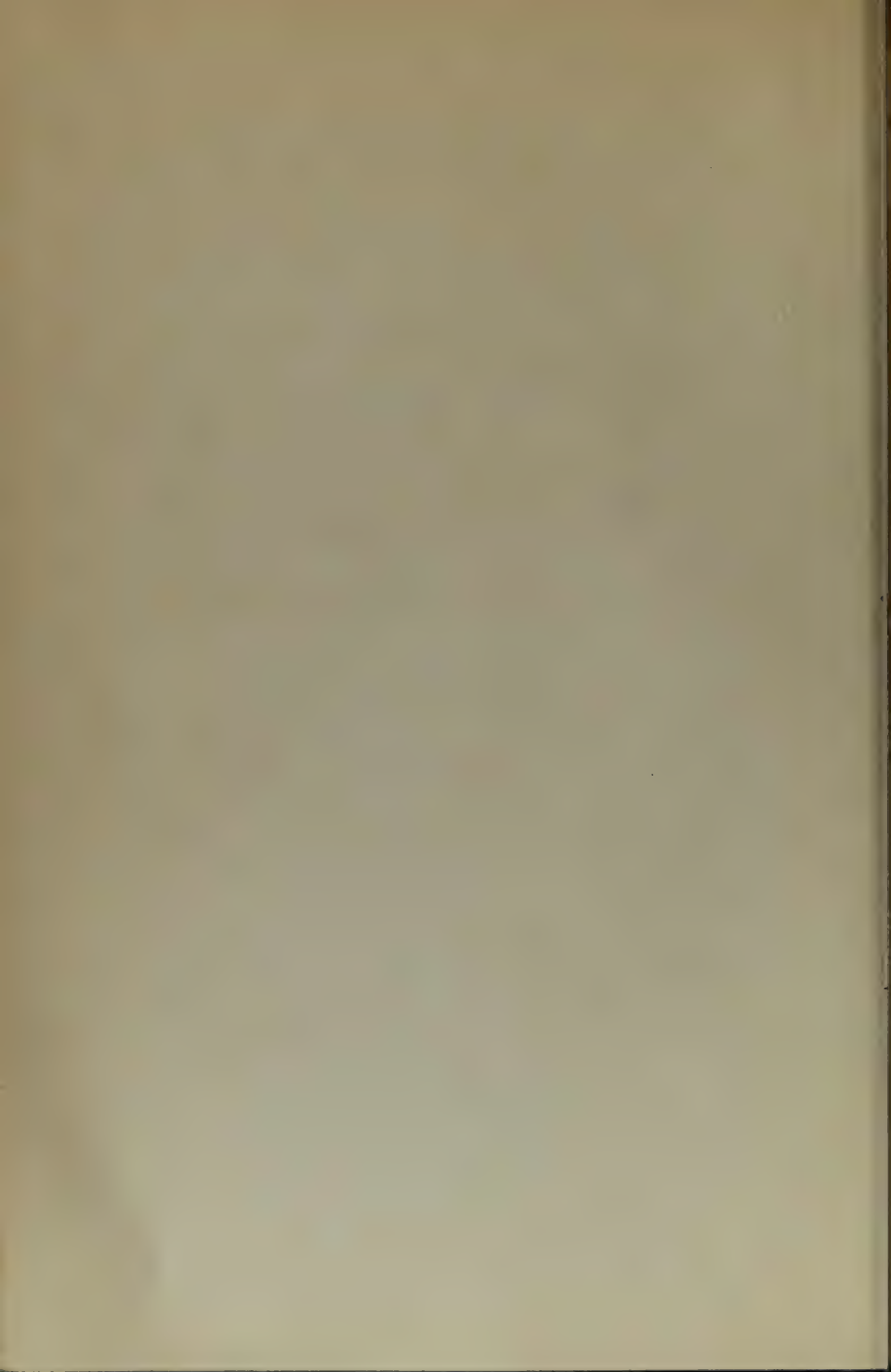
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CHILDREN
OF THE
MOUNTAIN EAGLE





CHAPTER I

BOR

BOR was an Albanian mountain baby and the day she was born snow lay so thick on the hills above the Shala valley that she was named for the snow; "Bor" it was in her language. Almost as soon as she was born her mother strapped her snugly to the cradle board of her rough wooden cradle. Gjok her father had hewn it with his big knife and his ax blade out of the soft wood of a tree that grew in the lower valley.

Bor's mother wanted her to be fine and straight as mountain women are, so she bound Bor's two little legs flat to the board and wrapped the long belting round and round her body so that her little hands and arms lay stretched close and tight beside her. Then, to cover her, her mother had woven pretty wool blankets which in the cold nights she drew even over Bor's face, for the rude stone house could not keep out the mountain chill and the fire burned down to gray ashes in the long darkness of the winter nights.

Bor felt safe and warm lying on her cradle board and wrapped so tightly, and she was happy enough, sleeping sometimes and sometimes crying to her mother for food; and often satisfied and comfortable she would lie gazing up at the dark smoky brushwood that made the ceiling of her mountain home.

As Bor grew she found her cradle much too small to hold her any longer and her mother untied the bindings and let her crawl and creep about over the earthen floor of the house. She was dressed in a coarse little shirt that left her legs and arms bare and free. How Bor did love to kick and roll after all her quiet baby days in the cradle.

As she learned to toddle she found out what a cozy place she had to live in. It was just one room,

but this seemed quite enough for any child, especially when one end of it was fenced off neatly for the goats and sheep. Long before Bor had left the cradle she was used to the bleating and baaing of them and to the cluck and cackle of the chickens that roosted here and there inside the house. But once she could move around a bit she began to discover things.

The first thing she noticed was the fire, a bright sparkling thing in the middle of the room on the floor. Bor crawled over to it one day to play with it and her mother called in a big frightening voice, "Look out! Look out, Bor! The big Gargoli will bite you!" "Gargoli" was their word for giant. And Bor stopped crawling and looked at the fire and then at her mother. The fire flickered red and yellow. Bor looked at it. Then she crept a little nearer. Her mother left her weaving and went to Bor and picked her up.

"Shall I show you how he bites, the Gargoli?" she said, and she carried Bor close to the fire and taking her little hand she held it close, very close to the hot ashes. Bor wriggled and cried out. How the giant did bite, to be sure. Her mother put the hand nearer yet. The skin grew red with the heat. This time Bor screamed. Her mother drew her away. But Bor was sobbing. Her hand was burned ever so little

but it smarted badly. She wept softly, nursing the red fingers.

"So," said her mother gently, all love and kindness, "my little Bor must never go too close to the hearth where the Fire Giant lives." And Bor never did. No matter how the flames shone and sparkled and sent lovely red tongues licking up over the fag-gots Bor never tried to play with them. They made her remember her sore hand, for two days and nights it had hurt her. What a wicked old Fire Giant to bite like that. And Bor watched him from far off. And her mother was happy and could work hard at her cooking and knitting and weaving for she knew that her little daughter was safe. She had taught Bor the lesson of the fire as every child in the mountains must learn it; for the fire was always there waiting to hurt the child who did not know its danger.

As Bor grew bigger her mother took wool from the back of their sheep and pulled it out into fibres and wove it and pressed it and beat it in the water of the mountain stream until it became a heavy whitish felt; and out of this she made Bor's clothing—a little waist and stiff skirt that stood out like a bell around her, and the seams of it were braided with heavy black braid that Bor's mother had braided herself of very long black threads.

Every summer Bor's father was busy in the valley planting and tending corn on the rocky lands. In the fall, the baskets of bright yellow kernels were brought inside and emptied into a huge hogshead of a basket, a giant wicker thing twice as tall as Bor herself. Bor loved to see the grains go pouring in. She loved the swishing sound of them as they rolled over each other higgledy-piggledy, rushing into the great wicker bin. She would peer and peek through the twigs and strips that made the bin and watch the yellow mass getting higher and higher until the bin was full to the top. And there was a sort of corn dust that always got in her eyes and nose and made her sneeze over and over again. Then her mother would say, "Health to you! Health to you!" for every sneeze she gave, to keep off any cold or sickness, she told Bor.

When the corn bin was quite full Bor's father would lift her up and kneeling on his shoulders she would look at the yellow kernels heaped to the brim and she would watch her father draw his hand criss-cross, this way then that, through the grains, leaving on the surface the mark of a cross. Bor knew this cross meant a blessing on their corn to protect and keep it. She'd seen the same mark on the bottom of the flat shallow pan her mother baked the bread in.

Often Bor watched her mother turn out the fresh loaf of coarse yellow meal and there on the bottom of it would be this same mark, right in the dough itself.

Once Bor, with her mother to help, made a little slim cross of twigs for herself, peeled twigs tied together where they crossed each other. That day her father washed very carefully and shaved his head quite clean, all but the funny scalp lock at the top, and his face, too, all but the big moustache Bor thought so handsome. Then he and her mother and Bor herself, all three, walked miles and miles through the valley and over a high mountain pass into the next valley. On just a footpath they went, single file, and Bor got very tired. Once for a rough bit her father carried her. And after a long morning of going they came to a new village, stone houses different from those Bor had seen scattered over her own valley and in the center of them a bigger stone house, higher, with a cross marked on it and a bell fastened over the roof in a little house of its own. Bor could hear it ringing, "Ding-dong."

"That's the church, Bor," her mother told her. Then her father stood his rifle outside the door and they went crowding in with a great many other mountain people—men without rifles, women in

clean chemises under their soiled woolen clothes, children like Bor carrying slim peeled crosses of twigs.

Such a crowd there was inside! Bor heard voices all chanting together. "It's a prayer, Bor," whispered her mother, and they all knelt. The little crosses were passed up for blessing and Bor felt glad she had made hers so fine and strong and had peeled off the bark so smoothly.

When it was all over they talked a bit with the people and there was a feast of boiled mutton and meal cooked with butter in one of the chief houses of the village. And then Bor and the other children carried their crosses home very carefully for they were holy now. Gjok, her father, fastened it up over the door when they got back. "It is a blessing on our house," said he; "it brings good fortune."

"Our corn will grow and our animals will be fat and healthy," said her mother, Dani. Bor listened happily.

She loved the animals. There were six sheep and three goats that lived in the wicker pen at one side of the room. Her father would take them out of mornings to a neighbor whose little boy took them to pasture with his mother's sheep. Bor loved seeing them go, the goats all brown and shaggy with a queer

strong smell Bor's nose was used to and liked, and the sheep all marked with red on the backs, their wool dyed red in a big spot, her father's mark, that kept other shepherds from taking his sheep if they strayed.

Trit-trot, out they would go when her father opened the pen gate; trit-trot, across the floor past the fire to the house door. Trit-trot, trit-trot. "Let me go, too, Father," begged Bor.

"In a while, in a while, when you are bigger," he would say. And Bor would stand watching at the door longing to be big enough for shepherding.

"Come, feed the chickens, Bor," her mother called, and she would drive them out of the corner where they roosted at night and spread the corn in the yard for them.

"Cluck-cluck, scratch, scratch, scratch." What a fuss they made over corn and the worms and bugs they caught in the grass. Bor laughed at them.

In the spring five curly lambs were born and two straight-haired baby goats, one brown and one mottled black and white. Bor loved to smooth and pet them. The two kids played with her in the corner of the room where the old goat took care of them behind a special little wicker pen that Bor had

helped her mother fasten there. And the lambs went out in the yard with her and jumped and tumbled, and the newest ones wobbled about on their long shaky legs and squealed after their mothers.

This year Bor was seven years old though she did not know it and her father and mother kept no track of her age. They knew she was getting big. They said to each other, "Bor is a big girl now."

One evening in early summer her father was sitting by the fire with Bor beside him while her mother piled the ashes on the bread pan for baking the evening bread.

"Bor," said her father, "to-morrow you may take our flock to the fields. Go with Gjelosh, our neighbor's boy. He will show you where the best lands are and he will show you how to keep the flock from wandering too far."

Bor's eyes shone. "I'm glad, Father," she said. "I'll be very, very careful."

"Bring them all home," warned her mother, "every one, and watch the little ones that they don't get lost or tired."

That night Bor crawled under her blanket on the hard floor with her head full of dreams about to-morrow. She wouldn't be helping around the house

to-morrow, carrying water and feeding chickens, and winding wool. She had real work of her own. She was a shepherd now, like the other little girls and boys in the village. She saw herself climbing up the rocks after her goats and leading her sheep over the tiny paths to the pasture ground.





CHAPTER II

SHEPHERD GIRL

VERY early Bor was awake. The pen gate was opened and trit-trot, out went the goats and Bor after them. The sheep followed.

She and Gjelosh met on the hill below her house. His flock was larger than hers and he was glad to have another watcher. His sheep were marked with blue. Off trotted the animals together.

"Brrr, brrr," said Gjelosh, his lips puffed out to make the funny sound. The goats heard and left their nibbling of the wayside bushes and ran on up

the path. Bor's bare feet liked the feeling of the dirt track and her legs were full of such liveliness that she ran and skipped ahead, pushing the fat sheep to one side.

After a time she saw a fine grassy slope before them with rocky spots here and there and low bushes where the goats loved to browse and bite off the tender tips of the branches.

"Here's a good spot for us," said Gjelosh. He counted his sheep to be sure they were all with him. Bor did the same. Yes, all were there.

Gjelosh and Bor sat down in the field together.

"Just keep your eye on them," said Gjelosh. "The goats go off far sometimes." He picked up a stone and hurled it out in front of a goat that was heading away from the rest. The animal ducked his head and turned back to the herd.

"See," said Gjelosh, "you can turn them like that with pebbles and save yourself running after them."

Bor thought this was a splendid idea and practiced throwing pebbles to the outer edge of the flock.

"Nib-nibble," went the sheep, pulling at the good grass, and the goats grunted as they reared up to get the soft young leaves at the top of the bushes. "Ba-a-a," went the little lambs, trotting close to

their mothers, and the little kids butted each other with their hard little heads where the mere nubbins of horns were showing. The sun shone warm on the grass and the top of the mountain above them glistened with faint touches of late snow. The wind blew through the valley and Bor sat cross-legged humming to herself with happiness.

From time to time she counted the herd, the red-marked ones, her own. She did not let Gjeloš see her counting; she did it softly to herself. Perhaps when she had been a shepherd a long time she wouldn't bother so much. She would lie in the grass like Gjeloš then and look up into the clear blue summer sky. But to-day was her first day and she didn't want to run a single risk of losing any one of the flock the very first time her father had trusted her.

How warm the sun was! Bor sang again to herself.

"I know a song," said Gjeloš, and sang it. It was a new one to Bor and long—a story of battles and brave men. "My father sings it," said Gjeloš. "His father taught him."

"Sing it again," said Bor, "and glory to your mouth." For this was a way of praising in her language. Gjeloš sang it again all through. Then he got to his feet.

"We must take them a bit farther," he said, "they've eaten all they can find here." And on through a strip of woods went the two children with the herds between them. Gjeloš led and Bor hurried the stragglers.

"Take a stick and poke them on," called Gjeloš, and Bor broke off a branch of a low tree and prodded a lazy goat with it.

In the next pasture they sat on a high rock and the flocks grazed a little below them. The sun was high. The sheep seemed to walk on their own shadows. Out of her blouse Bor took goat's cheese and cornbread. Gjeloš had some, too. They ate together.

Bor remembered her knitting. Since she was five she had knitted, and she was very busy now making dark red slippers to wear under her goatskin moccasins at Easter. How lucky her mother had reminded her to take her work with her. She drew it out. Click-click, went the steel needles. Shiny they were. Her mother had brought them home from the bazaar in Skodra.

She stopped knitting, and standing on the rock counted her animals once more. "Yes, all here." She breathed a tiny sigh of contentment and set to work in earnest on the "shputa" as she called them.

Gjelosh took a hollow reed out of his girdle. "I made it last week," he said. "See, it has five holes," and he showed her. Bor could knit without watching her work very closely. Her needles flew as she watched Gjelosh fitting his fingers over the holes.

"Shepherds' music," thought Bor. And Gjelosh put the reed to his lips.

A pretty piping tune came out as he blew and moved his fingers, now uncovering one hole, now another. Up and down, up and down went the soft ripple of the sounds. The sheep raised their heads as if to listen a minute.

"The lambs are dancing," said Bor. For the lambs had started at the music and gone skipping over the grass in their excitement.

Gjelosh tried other notes, a new tune now. "I make them up sometimes," he said. "Here, try it," and he offered the pipe to her.

Bor put the end to her mouth and blew. What a squeak came out!

"Oh," she laughed, "this is only my first day as shepherd. I can't make your music."

The sun was sinking. Gjelosh slipped the pipe into the wrapped belt he wore. "Home, now," he said. "Brrr, brrr," he called, and threw pebbles to the far edge of the herd. He had a blouseful, Bor no-

ticed. She would remember to keep some with her to-morrow.

The animals raised their heads curiously. The leader of the sheep started off after Gjelosh and the rest followed. The goats pushed ahead, nibbling at every bush they passed. "Brrr, brrr," mimicked Bor, pouting out her lips as she had seen Gjelosh do.

Over the faint trails they went, the sheep with the lambs following last of all. The kids seemed stronger. They kept up with their mothers at the front of the herd with Gjelosh.

One of the red-backed sheep lingered behind all the rest. The lamb was lagging farther back.

"He's tired, maybe," said Bor to herself, and went back and took the woolly little fellow in her arms. Then she had to run to catch up with Gjelosh and the herd. The lamb was so soft she did not notice at first how heavy it was. The old sheep, its mother, trotted beside her. Bor clambered up a rocky place after the last of the flock, brrr-ing as she went. She was a bit breathless now lugging the fat little animal. She was glad when the path sloped down, for it rested her a bit.

The way was long. The sun sank lower. Bor's arms ached, but when she put the lamb down it would not move. It just stood and bleated and the mother

sheep came back and stood by it nuzzling it. Bor watched Gjeloosh and the herd getting farther and farther off.

She knew she must not lose sight of them and she could not go on and leave the lamb to stand and bleat. There was only one thing to do. Bor leaned and lifted the lamb again in her arms. Heavy little chunk. She clutched it tight. Her tough little bare feet scampered after the other animals. They were far ahead. Bor panted up. Her arms ached worse than ever. She thought of the long lovely day, lying in the grass so lazy and happy, the music they had made. Shepherding had seemed so easy until now.

The lamb got heavier and heavier. Bor stumbled on a sharp stone. She bit her lip to keep it from quivering. Tears came into her eyes, stinging them, but she would not let them fall. She blinked hard. She must go on. She was a shepherd, and she wouldn't cry. Shepherds always carried the tired lambs and they never cried.

To set the lamb down was to lose it and its mother, too. What sort of a shepherd was that to go out with sixteen in the flock and come back with fourteen? You couldn't do that. Not if you were a shepherd. Oh, how her arms ached! One tear over-

flowed in spite of her and splashed down on the lamb's nose.

She looked ahead at the flock. Gjelošh was turning off to his house and driving her own animals back with his stick and pebbles. Now they were all for her to look after. She was going to be home soon with all of them safe and sound.

She held tight to the lamb. She did not know she was crying. Her breath came fast but she did not feel the tears. She was leading the herd now, but her legs wouldn't go as fast as she wanted them to. But she was a shepherd and she was bringing back her flock, every one of them.

The dark was falling when she stumbled up to the door. Her mother was waiting outside. "Oh, there you are, Bor," she called. Her voice was glad.

The goats and sheep all stopped to drink at the stream by the yard's edge. Bor set the lamb down, and turning her back she wiped her face with her sleeve. She was surprised to find it wet with crying and she wiped harder for her mother mustn't see any tears. She could hear her mother counting the flock as she came down to the stream.

"Gjok," she called back to her husband, "the child is back without an animal missing. She's brought them every one."

Bor heard her father where he was sitting by the fire inside give his short laugh. "Of course she has," he called back, "I told you she'd make a good shepherd."

Bor heard, and her heart gave a big thump of gladness. She felt proud. Her arms hurt, but she didn't mind now. Her stubbed toe had bled a little. She saw the blood on it now. But that didn't matter.

Up to the house and in she went, the flock following and her mother behind them.

Her father looked over his shoulder at her and watched the sheep and goats going in one by one behind the wicker pen.

"Sixteen, every last one, my little shepherdess. I told your mother you'd do it right."

Bor went over to him and sat down by the fire.

"I had to carry one of the lambs," she said, "that's why I'm late."

"You're not too late," said her father. "But sleep sound to-night and make an early start to-morrow."

Bor snuggled up near to him. She was glad he wasn't fussing over her, glad he didn't notice the tear marks nor the ache in her arms nor her scarred toe.

He knew she was big enough.

He knew she could herd sheep.

He put out his hand and patted her kerchiefed head.

"Bor, the shepherdess," he said softly.

And as Bor bit into the coarse cornbread her mother handed her, tears stung her eyes a second, but they were tears of pride. She smiled to herself.

"I *am* a shepherdess," she thought, and forgot all her sorrows while through her went a new kind of happiness.





CHAPTER III

BABY SKANDER

COME and see your little brother, Bor." Bor's father, Gjok, stood at the door of the house. Bor was in the yard making trails through the fallen leaves by scuffing through them with her feet close together. She looked up at Gjok and her heart gave a little bump of excitement.

"Is it true, Father? Is there really a brother?" Her happiness got into her voice and made the words come fast.

"Listen," said Gjok, and he held his hand up as if to still the rustling of the leaves under her feet.

Bor listened. From inside the house there came a little squeaking cry. It made her think of the squeal

of a tiny lamb or the sounds the baby pigs make when they push each other about hunting for food.

She looked at Gjok. "Is *that* the baby?" she asked, not believing.

"Come and see," said her father, his face breaking into a big smile. He held the door back for her to go in.

Inside the light was dim as it always was and from a shadowy corner came that little squealing sound. Bor made out her mother there and her grandmother crouched beside her. They were both bending over watching something. Bor went closer.

"Come see your brother, Bor," said Dani, her mother.

Bor went up and squatted close to a little bundle her mother held. Dani pushed back the wrappings and Bor saw a little pink face tinier than any face she had ever seen before, with a little wee nose and eyes screwed up tight and a mouth that opened and shut as she looked.

"Oh," she said, "how tiny he is!"

Gjok laughed. "You didn't think he would come full grown with a rifle on his back, did you?"

"Indeed he's not tiny," said Grandmother. "He's a big baby. You were smaller than that when you were born."

Bor leaned nearer. "What a funny brother! What is his name, Mother?"

"He hardly has one yet," said Dani. "Your father wants him named Skander."

"That is a good name," said Bor, for she had heard stories of a great man whose name was Skander.

"We will name him Skander," said Gjok, "and perhaps he will grow to be as great as Skander-Beg himself."

Soon Skander lay wound with many wrappings and bound to the stiff board of his cradle.

"We will tie him snugly in," said Dani to Bor, "and then he will grow straight and strong like you."

At first he did not eat at all. He only licked butter off Dani's finger sometimes.

"Is that all he eats?" said Bor.

"When he is three days old," said Dani, "he shall have milk." And sure enough the next day Dani held him to her breast and nursed him.

A woman came to see Skander. Bor opened the door for her. She was a friend of Dani's in the village. She brought four eggs and Bor watched what she did.

She took one egg and stroked Skander's forehead with it and said, "I wish you a long life!" Then she took a second egg and stroked one cheek. "I wish

you good fortune," she said. Then she took a third egg and stroked the other cheek. "May you grow up with your parents!" she said. Then she took the last egg and touched Skander's chin with it and said, "May your beard be white!"

Bor understood what the woman meant. She was wishing Skander good health and luck and wishing he might grow up safe at home with his father and mother to take care of him; and the last wish was a wish that he might live to be a very old man, even till he had a long white beard. This all pleased Bor. Wishes like that would help Skander, she felt sure.

After that other women came from the village and from farther off, and each brought the four eggs with the four wishes for Skander. Bor was happy.

Skander got fatter and bigger, and when Dani nursed him he would take a great deal of milk. "Like a greedy little pig!" laughed Bor.

Sometimes Bor rocked Skander's cradle and sang to him:

"Oh, oh, ni-na, ni-na,
Sleep, sleep, ni-na-my,
Rocking in your wooden cradle,
Ni-na, ni-na, sleepy-bye."

And Skander would shut his eyes and go fast asleep.

When Dani sang Bor listened so she could learn other songs.

When Gjok came in Bor would sing to Skander:

“Clap hands, my dear,
For father is here,
With candies so sweet,
For Baby to eat,
And apples and figs,
For good little pigs.”

And Skander would look up and smile.

“Of course not real candies, Skander,” Bor would tell him, “that’s just the song.” Then Skander would smile more than ever and make odd little sounds in his throat.

Bor was so much interested in the baby that winter that there were a great many things going on around her that she did not notice.

Gjok and Dani talked together softly by the fire as Bor was falling asleep in her corner, and their faces were worried.

When Grandmother cut the bread she cut it in small pieces. Bor did notice that.

“Why do you give such small pieces, Grandmother?” asked Bor.

"Because cornmeal is precious," Grandmother answered.

Gjok walked out every day now through the snow and came back very soon without a smile.

"Why do you look so serious, Father?" Bor asked one day.

"Because the snow is so deep, Bor, that all the trails are blocked," Gjok answered, and he did not go to the bazaar in Skodra that week or the next.

Dani mixed bread. Bor watched her pour the yellow batter into the pan. It did not spread out and fill the shallow pan but lay like a tiny cake in the center of it.

"What a little loaf it will be, Mother!" said Bor.

"We must make it last twice as long as a big loaf," said Dani, and Bor saw that her forehead was wrinkled in a frown.

That night at "evening bread" the pieces of "buk kalamuchit" were so small that Bor got only three good bites out of hers and it was gone.

"I'm hungry, Mother," said Bor.

"We all are, Bor," said her mother.

Then Bor understood.

She didn't say anything but the next day she looked into the wooden keg that held the cornmeal made of the ground-up corn kernels that had gone

into the big bin last fall. She peeked and saw inside a little yellow meal, and through the thin layer of it the bottom of the keg showed.

Now she knew why Grandmother cut the bread so small, and why Dani baked such tiny loaves, and why Gjok went out so often to see how deep the snow was on the trail to Skodra. There was always cornmeal for sale in Skodra bazaar, and winter there was not like winter in the mountains. Even when snow lay thickest in the passes roses could bloom in Skodra.

That night she was hungry again after supper and she couldn't get to sleep right away. She lay in her corner wrapped tight in her blanket and listened to what was being said around the fire.

Dani and Gjok and her grandmother sat crouched near the hearth. Gjok was not smoking as usual. He was busy talking to the two women. Bor heard him.

"To-morrow I will start early, there has been some melting though the spring is late, and I will try my luck on the trail to Skodra. You have enough food for two more days with managing a bit. If I do not get back in two days' time best try yourselves a trip to Lekaj. Your sister's house there may have meal enough to spare us some. Her husband said last fall his harvest had been good. That is the plan."

He looked at the grandmother, then said, "Mother, does the plan seem good to you?"

Dani looked at her, too, while the old woman sat thinking, saying not a word. Then Bor heard her grandmother's voice, "A good plan, son, but neither of us must take the trail alone, and Skander cannot stand a cold, long trip like that."

Gjok frowned. "We must get food somehow," he said, "and to eat meat now would mean the loss of the flock's increase this summer." Then he added gently, "If no water runs the mill wheel cannot turn."

Bor knew what her father meant. Cornmeal was just as important to hungry people as water was to the mill.

Dani spoke next, "We will both go, we women, each can help the other on the trail, and there will not be danger of one being lost or wearied out alone with no one near to help. Bor shall stay here with Skander."

"To Lekaj will not take long," said Gjok, "if luck is with you. But my hope is that you will not need to go at all. I'll get back here myself with meal enough in two days' time. Your sister's house at Lekaj has a family much larger than our own and like enough their meal is nearly gone. Better not ask

unless we're driven to it. So," he rose, stretched, "to sleep that I may start before the sun."

They lay down not far from the dying fire. Grandmother came to where Bor lay.

"What, open-eyed, my little sparrow? Why is it sleep has not taken you?" she asked.

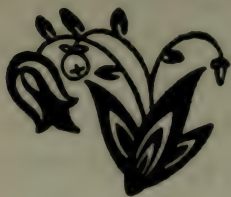
Bor smiled in the dark but said nothing.

Her grandmother lay down beside her. "It is a cold night, chicken, and I'll sleep with you so we may warm each other."

Bor curled up against her. Comfort this was, after the anxious words she'd listened to.

"Good-night, Grandmother," she whispered softly.

"Good-night, little sparrow, sleep peacefully," answered Grandmother.





CHAPTER IV

BOR KEEPS THE HOUSE

GJOK went early on the trail to Skodra and for two days Dani, Grandmother, Bor, and Skander waited for him to come back.

"The snows are heavy on the necks of the mountains," said Grandmother; "he must go slowly."

"I used the last cornmeal to-day," said Dani.

Bor listened, thoughtful.

The day following her mother and grandmother made ready to go to her aunt's house in Lekaj.

Dani nursed Skander just before they left.

"We will go as fast as we can, Bor," said she, "and perhaps Skander will not get hungry before I am here again to feed him. Keep the house well. Have a

good fire. It is cold, and you will need it. Take good care of your brother and when we come back there will be cornbread for supper."

"I will eat cheese for noonday lunch," said Bor.

"Yes, but there is not too much of that so do not be greedy," Dani said. Then she smiled, and putting her hands one on each of Bor's shoulders she looked into her brown bright eyes. "Remember, my Bor, to-day you are the woman of the house, the 'Zoi Shpis,' and all the fortune of the house rests in your hands. You will make coffee if a guest should come, and all my work is yours. I trust it to you." She leaned and put her cheek to Bor's cheek. "Good-bye, Bor, luck be with you."

Grandmother came and patted Bor's kerchiefed head. "Good-bye, Keeper of the House," she said.

"Good-bye, Mother, good-bye, Grandmother," Bor answered. "Go on a smooth trail."

Even as she said these usual words she knew how hard the trail would be for them—deep snow in the valleys, deeper on the passes and the higher hills. Only last night, cuddled against her grandmother, she had dreamed of Gjok wading through mountain drifts lost in a great storm. Remembering that dream, a little fear came in her heart. She drove it out bravely, standing at the door to see them go.

The houses of her own village were nearer than her aunt's house at Lekaj, but Bor knew why her mother did not ask for cornmeal from a neighbor. Her father's land was good corn land, no one had better, and she knew in every house to-day there was no extra food, only enough, and in some houses not enough. You could not ask help from houses that needed help themselves.

Bor shut the door and went back to the fire.

Skander slept. Bor peeked at him to see, rocking the cradle for a minute with her hand.

How still the house was! Only herself and Skander. In the pen at the side of the room she heard the tramlings of the sheep and goats stirring about.

Well, she would keep house as well as she knew how. She would look after everything and keep things safe and cozy for them all.

She piled a handful of faggots on the fire and by the blazing light of them she found her mother's broom. Of twigs and fine brush-like branches it was made, tied strongly at the top. She swept the crumbs of cheese they had made breakfast of into the fire, picking the larger bits up, eating them, so nothing should be wasted.

Then she set the broom back in its corner and went to the tiny window in the stone wall of the

house. She stood on tiptoe to unfasten the little wooden shutter that closed it. A cold wind blew in through the small opening. Bor shut it quickly. She had seen the gray sky—full of snow it looked. "It mustn't snow to-day," she said out loud. Snow would make the trails worse and the going slow.

Skander woke, gave a little cry.

"He's calling me," said Bor. She dragged the cradle nearer to the fire.

"I've a new song for you," she told him gayly, anxious that he should not know his mother was not there.

Squatting beside him then she sang:

"As the dove to her young one
I sing to my dear,
Sleep will come asking,
'Is baby boy here?'

"Yes, yes, he's awake now,
But waiting for you.
So, Sleep, you may take him,
But bring him back, do."

She sang the song twice, and Skander's eyelids closed slowly over his bright eyes, lifted, closed, lifted, then dropped again, and he was fast asleep.

"Now Sleep has taken him and he is happy," said Bor, looking at his quiet face that seemed to smile a little as he lay there.

Bor got her knitting from a corner and sitting down beside the cradle she knitted busily. She was making some tiny wool slippers just big enough for Skander's feet. Of purple wool they were. Her fingers flew and her thoughts ran along as fast.

"When they are done," she thought, "I shall get gold thread from Skodra and I will stitch lovely designs on the top of them—flowers and leaves, and maybe, if I can, a little gold bird with wings. That will bring him luck. And how he will love his shputa with such bright trimmings on the purple worsted."

In the pen she could hear the goats and sheep trampling and bleating more noisily now.

She peeped at Skander. He was fast asleep. A good time now for her to look after the animals.

She went softly over to the pen. The sheep and goats heard her coming and set up a great baaing and bleating. Bor took a wooden bowl and filling it with water from the keg near the house door she went inside the pen where they all were.

How they pushed and shoved! Bor had a hard time to keep her bowl from spilling and a harder time yet to see that each animal got his chance at

the water. Three times she filled the bowl and the last time emptied the keg. The thirsty things—to drink up all the water like that!

Out in the yard was a tall pole stuck in the ground and, heaped around it, was a pile of branches, laid carefully in a stack, the leafy ends to the center. Bor had helped her grandmother make this stack last summer when the leaves were green and fresh. Now Bor went out, and grasping a stem here and there she pulled out some of the branches. The leaves that had been hidden from the air were still greenish in color and full of juiciness. The wind bit her fingers as she worked, but she kept on bravely till she had a good armful. Then back she went to the pen and put the branches where the animals could reach them for their food. She heard them nibbling and chewing greedily in the half darkness of their pen.

She listened to see if their noise had waked Skander. No sound from that side of the room, only the crackling fire.

She looked at the water keg.

No good housekeeper would ever let her water keg sit empty like that, she knew.

Her mother had left all things to her care, had trusted her with everything. And this was one plain duty to be done.

Bor picked up the keg, binding it with strips of cloth to her shoulders as she had often seen her mother do. Steadying it with one hand she opened the house door and took the trodden way down to the spring.

The wind blew colder now, for the sun that made the middle of the day so warm could not pierce through the clouds. Bor ran to warm herself. The spring was quite far down the hill and Skander must not be too long alone.

She set the keg under the trickling outlet of the spring and waited for its slow filling.

She looked up at the sky. Yes, it was a snowy sky. Her mother had said if the way was good that early after noon they would be back. If snow came Bor knew there would be delay—and Skander would be hungry.

The keg was full. Bor tried to lift it, poured a little out to make it lighter.

This was hard, getting it on her back to carry home. At length she had it set and firmly bound and she started up the path back to the house. The hill was steep. She panted—stopped to rest—blew on her fingers purple with the wind. Then she went on. Hard work. Her back ached carrying such a load. But she would keep the house right. They must not

come home and find no water ready. After all, a mountain woman had hard things to do, and there was always strength to do them with. She stopped for breath. No use to rest too long. Better to push on hard and rest once she was safe with Skander. So she pushed, pressing her teeth against her under lip, calling on all her strength.

"I'm strong," she told herself, "strong like the rocks."

Panting, she reached the door. Skander was crying.

She went inside and setting down the keg with a great tired sigh she ran over to his cradle.

"Sh, sh, little eagle," she said, rocking the cradle hard.

But Skander cried louder yet.

Bor piled on faggots, then a large stick from the corner pile of wood.

"Perhaps you're cold," she said. "The fire will warm you and Bora will sing you the song of the naughty pigeon."

Then she sang as she rocked him a song Gjeloš had taught her, and Skander, warmed with the fire, forgot he was getting hungry and lay watching Bor's lips moving with the words she sang.

And this was the song:

"What is in the threshing room?

Sheaves and sheaves of wheat.

Feast of grain for anyone.

Pigeon comes to eat.

"Picks the wheat grains from the stalks

With his bill, peck, peck,

Thirsty, finds the water jar,

With its narrow neck.

"Perched upon the curving rim

Pigeon sips and sips.

Leans too far and—splash! one foot

In the bottle slips.

"Flap, flap, go the pigeon's wings,

Such a noisy clatter!

Just a thief caught by the leg,

That is what's the matter!

And that served the pigeon right, Skander," said Bor.

"He shouldn't have been in the threshing room stealing wheat."

Skander seemed to agree because he lay quietly looking at her without making a sound.

Bor got a small piece of cheese from the cheese barrel and sat nibbling it by the fire.

Very soon now Dani and Grandmother ought to be coming back. If they didn't come soon—well—Bor looked anxiously at the baby. He was hungry now and it wouldn't be long before he would begin to cry in earnest.

She must get more wood for the fire. Perhaps if she kept him very warm——

She went out to the wood pile, stopping for a drink of water at the keg.

She took a big armload and staggered through the door and across the floor with it. Being the Keeper of the House was hard work, after all. But wood was just as important as water. She had helped her mother and grandmother gather it last summer, big twigs and little twigs, bending down to pick it up, up and down, up and down, till her back ached. Once she had complained and Dani had said, "Your back aches because it is getting strong." And sure enough, before the wood was all gathered there had been no more aching and Bor had carried back almost as much as her mother.

When Bor had set the wood not far from the hearth and put another stick on the fire Skander started to cry again.

"He thought I was Mother coming in, maybe," thought Bor, and she rocked the cradle hard.

Still Skander cried.

"Perhaps he's not comfortable," she thought, and she carefully undid the bands that tied him to the cradle board and unwrapped his many wrappings. But this only made him cry harder than ever.

Despairing, Bor tied him up again.

"I'll sing you *all* my songs, Skander," she offered.

And she did. First the sleepy song, "Ni-na, ni-na"; then the little rhyme about Gjok and the candies; then the song that asks Sleep to take him. "Oh, I wish you *would* take my baby, Sleep," Bor exclaimed at the end of that one. Then the song about the naughty pigeon that stole the grain, "You *must* listen to this one, Skander," said Bor, but still Skander cried.

Bor went to the door and looked anxiously outside. No sign of anyone on the trail. Snow had begun drifting down in fine flakes. Bor's forehead wrinkled anxiously as she shut the door and went back to the fire.

Oh, how hard Skander was crying!

"I know he's hungry," said Bor. She went over and untied him from the cradle. Then sitting down cross-legged by the hearth she laid him face down across her knees, patting his back as she had seen her mother do.

"Sh, sh, sh," she said.

She felt hungry herself. If only they would get back with the cornmeal. She knew the snow would keep her father in Skodra even longer, but if only her mother would come back.

Though the tiny window was shuttered it seemed to be growing darker in the house. It was getting late and with the storm and night coming how hard the trail would be.

"Sh, sh, Skander."

But her mother was strong. Bor had seen her go every day to the spring and carry the heavy water keg back up the hill without once stopping to rest. And what great bundles of wood she carried in for the fire! Gjok, her father, worked hard in the fields plowing and planting, and caring for the corn, but Dani worked just as hard, harder maybe, Bor thought. She cooked all the meals though Grandmother helped some, and she wove all the cloth for the family clothing, pounding the heavy wool in the cold stream to make the thick white felt for skirts and trousers. Then the sheep were sheared for wool and Dani spun all that, slowly, with her fingers, twisting, twisting, balls and balls of it. If the spun yarn could be stretched out Bor knew it would reach all the way to Skodra and back again. And

knitting—Dani knitted faster than Bor herself, and socks and shputa were wearing out all the time. Then she wove cloth on the wooden loom, pushing the bobbin in between the threads. And think of all the bundles she carried in to the bazaar, her back never aching as Bor's had to-day, and all the time the heavy cradle with fat little Skander inside was tied to her shoulders.

Yes, her mother was *strong, strong*—brave, too. Bor had never seen her afraid, not even when Gjok had been wounded once on a trip through unfriendly country. And Bor knew she wouldn't be afraid now though snow blocked the pass and darkness fell over the mountains.

"Sh, sh, Skander," said Bor. How he was crying!

"You've a strong, brave mother, Skander, and she's coming home. Yes, she is, she is, she *is*." Bor patted the baby harder with each word. "Don't be afraid, Skander, she'll come. She knows you're hungry."

Yes, she imagined now she could see her mother trudging and climbing. No storm would stop her, no night, no darkness.

Bor's heart felt lighter.

She sat Skander up in her lap. How little he was!

His little back bent right over unless she propped it against her. And he didn't have any teeth, either. He couldn't chew as she did. He could only suck like a baby lamb or one of the new-born kids. Suddenly Bor remembered how they had fed one of the little lambs when the mother sheep had died. They had wet a cloth with milk and given the end of it to the lamb to suck, and when he had sucked it dry she had dipped it in the milk again and he had sucked again. And for a long time she had dipped the cloth that way until the lamb had sucked up all the milk in the bowl. That was the very thing! She knew now how to quiet Skander.

Tying him again in the cradle she brought water from the keg and warmed it in a little pot by the fire. There was no milk, but water would do for a while. And it must be warm, he would like it warm.

Bor took a little cloth and dipped it in the warm water, twisting it to a point so it would fit Skander's hungry mouth. She leaned over the cradle. If *only* this would satisfy him! He stopped crying and took the cloth eagerly in his open mouth, sucking, sucking, just as the lamb had done.

Bor dipped it again, and Skander sucked again.

"He thinks it *is* milk," said Bor happily. Now everything would be all right. Even if Dani and

Grandmother were very, very late she could keep Skander happy.

He looked happy already. A great feeling of relief went through Bor. At last she had hit on the very thing. She dipped busily and Skander sucked the water as happy as a little pig.

"Good baby," said Bor, and sang again, a song she had forgotten before:

"Skander, Skander, tell me true,
Who is it that follows you?

"Cows and oxen, buffalo,
Run behind me when I go."

Then the door opened and in came her mother!

Bor left the wet cloth in Skander's mouth and ran to meet her. "Mother, Mother, Mother," and buried her head against her wet skirt.

Dani lifted her and held her a minute close. "Hail, Bor, the Keeper of the House!" she said, and laid her cheek a moment on Bor's cheek.

Through her happiness Bor remembered, "Quick, Mother, Skander is *so* hungry," but even as she spoke Dani had the baby in her arms nursing him at her breast.

"Grandmother will come in a few days with one

of the men from Lekaj when the snow melts in the passes a little. I came alone," she said to Bor.

"I *knew* you'd come," Bor answered, and ran to the corner for more wood.

The fire blazed high. With smiling face Bor watched the bright tower of flame.

"You have kept it warm here," said her mother, approving. "Was there water enough?"

"I got more," said Bor.

"And the animals?" asked Dani.

"I fed them," said Bor.

"Skander was good, wasn't he?"

"Good till noon-time, since then crying, till I thought of giving him that rag to suck."

"My *good* girl," said her mother, smiling at her.

"You have been a fine Keeper of the House. You have brought water and wood and fed your baby. Now you may mix the cornbread all by yourself. There it is in that bag."

Bor ran to get it. Never before had she been allowed to make bread. But she knew how. She'd seen her mother make it every day.

In the wooden bowl Bor put water and cornmeal and crouching by the fire stirred busily.

"I know how to do a lot of things now, don't I, Mother?"

She poured the batter into the flat pan, covered it and set it in the coals, piling hot embers on the top with the fire shovel.

"There!" she said.

Skander, full of supper, had fallen fast asleep in his cradle.

Dani knitted while Bor watched the bread.

After a while she said, "It's done, now, I think, Mother."

"Very well," said Dani, knitting.

Bor raked off the ashes and handling the hot pan with a cloth drew it away from the fire.

She took off the cover. There lay the bread smooth and brown.

Getting the low table Bor set it near the hearth and turned out her bread on it to cool. Yes, it was baked well all over and the cross that always marked it underneath showed plainly. She had made a good loaf.

Now she got water and poured it slowly from the little can over her mother's hands stretched out to her. Then Dani poured that Bor might rinse her own.

"Evening bread is ready," then said Bor, and broke off two big pieces from the steaming loaf.

She was hungry, as hungry as ever Skander had been.

Dani wiped her hands on her kerchief and Bor handed her one of the pieces of bread.

"Good appetite, Mother," said Bor.

"Thank you," said Dani, and tasted. "It is good, Bor. Glory be to the hands that made it!"

Bor felt proud. Often she had heard people give such thanks to Dani for her cooking. Now she had done the cooking and the thanks were hers by right. She smiled, and thanked her mother for the praise.

Squatting in the warmth, she ate hungrily. "Such a long day it was, Mother."

"And a long trail for me," said Dani, "but my mind was at peace. I knew I had left my house and baby in safe hands."

Bor looked into her mother's face. "I don't mind hard things," she said, "when there is a good ending like this."

Now the bread was finished and Bor swept the crumbs into the fire.

"Only us two—and Skander," said Bor, sitting down beside her mother.

"No guests on such a night," said Dani, "and no songs to listen to."

"I'll sing one, Mother, one Gjeloš taught me."

"Do," said Dani.

And sitting there cross-legged by the hearth, the

shadows of the darkening room dancing about her in the flickering light, Bor fixed her eyes on the red coals before her and sang the pigeon song:

“What is in the threshing room? .

Sheaves and sheaves of wheat,
Feast of grain for anyone,
Pigeon comes to eat.

“Picks the wheat grains from the stalks

With his bill, peck, peck,
Thirsty, finds the water jar,
With its narrow neck.

“Perched upon the curving rim,

Pigeon sips and sips,
Leans too far and—splash! one foot
In the bottle slips.

“Flap, flap, go the pigeon’s wings,

Such a noisy clatter!
Just a thief caught by the leg,
That is what’s the matter!”

“Glory be to your mouth!” said her mother. “It is a lovely song.”

But Bor hardly heard her. Her head was nodding on her chest and she fell sideways against Dani, her sleepy lids dropping over her tired eyes.

Her mother laid her down by the fire and spread a blanket over her.

In Bor's drowsy ears words sounded, her mother's voice soft and gentle, "Sleep has carried off my Bor, the Keeper of the House."





CHAPTER V

SKANDER'S FEAST

THE hot summer came and went. The days were cooler now and leaves covered the little yard outside Bor's house.

"To-morrow," said Dani, "will be Skander's Feast."

"Goody," said Bor, "I will work hard and finish his shputa before supper to-night."

She was sitting cross-legged by the fire with her mother and while Dani knitted Bor worked pretty designs on the tiny ankle flaps of Skander's wool slippers. She held up her embroidery for Dani to see.

"Look, Mother, I am making a gold flower with silver leaves."

"Skander will like that," said her mother, looking at Bor's work while her needles flew. She looked around the room. "Now where is that little cucumber?" she said. Bor knew she meant the baby brother and she stopped her stitching and looked over toward the pen for the sheep and goats that ran along one wall.

There was the little cucumber, as his mother had called him, on his hands and knees with his snub nose pressed to the wicker bars of the pen and making queer little noises in his throat at the animals he saw inside.

Bor jumped up and ran over to get him.

"Come sit with us, Skander," she said, "and I will show you the fine slippers you will have to wear to-morrow at the feast of your Komorra."

She lifted the baby under the arms and held him so that his bare feet just touched the dirt floor.

"Walk, you little mountaineer," she said, laughing. "You are getting too big to crawl around like a bear-cub."

Skander only squealed little squeals and wiggled his fat legs, kicking the floor with his toes where he could reach it.

"A year ago he was born, wasn't he, Mother? Just before winter came and the leaves had fallen. Now outside the ground is covered again so it must be a year since we have our baby."

"Yes," said Dani, "he will walk soon. Yesterday he drew himself up to his feet there by the pen and really took several steps holding to the wall of it."

Bor set the baby on the floor next to her mother and sat down beside him. She thrust one of the little wool slippers she was embroidering into Skander's hands.

"Look, Skander, see what Bora is making for you," she said, pointing to the silver thread that ran in curved lines over the purple worsted. "He must wear these to-morrow when we make the feast for him," she said to Dani, "and then we have that fine colored blanket you have woven to wrap about him."

Dani said yes by moving her head sideways in the way Bor knew. "I have a fresh-made chemise for him, too," she said, "and a little wee jacket your father bought last week in Skodra Bazaar."

Skander sat between them flapping the slipper up and down. His bright eyes lighter brown than Bor's own danced merrily and his soft yellow hair

was rumped into tufts that stuck out here and there on his round head.

"Tell me about the feast, Mother," said Bor.

"Well," said Dani, "many people from the village will come in to celebrate this Feast of the Komorra and I shall kill the fattest kid and serve cornmeal with melted butter for everyone.

"Your father's friend Palok, who is to be Skander's Komorra, will come all the way from Abate. His wife and baby and his little boy will come with him and they will bring a sheep to give to Skander, a gift from his Komorra."

"What is a Komorra?" asked Bor.

"A sort of godfather," said her mother, "but much more than that. After to-morrow Palok will be to Skander like another father, friend, and guardian to him."

Bor hugged the baby up to her a minute. "Two fathers for one little eagle," she laughed. "Oh, you will be well taken care of, you rascal."

The baby squirmed and giggled. Bor picked up the purple slipper he had dropped and went on with her work of stitching gold lines. Her mother knitted fast on the big socks for Gjok to wear. Skander looked at them both a moment, watched their flying needles, then picked up a tiny stick off the floor near him and

dug the point of it into the hard earth, scratching it this way and that and making little sounds that were almost words.

"He is making designs like mine," said Bor, giving him a quick look and a smile.

"Let him wait till to-morrow," said Dani, "and Palok will make designs on his round head, the sign of the Komorra, marking him."

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To-morrow came.

Breakfast was over and Dani made preparation for the feast. She cut up the pork in cubes and then skinned and dressed the kid and cut the meat up for boiling. She piled wood on the fire and hung from the ceiling over the hottest flame a big black iron pot half filled with water. The chunks of meat went into this and after a little while it bubbled noisily. Bor watched the fire and kept on adding wood under the pot to keep it cooking hard. Dani made bread, too, lots of it, baking three big loaves one after another in the shallow covered pan buried in hot coals and ashes.

Then Bor dressed Skander in his party clothes—the new chemise white and clean. Skander looked wonderingly at the short sleeves that reached nearly

to his chubby elbows. Then she wrapped around him underneath his arms the colored blanket and after that fitted little socks on his bare feet and then the purple shputa over them, shining with their gold and silver flowers on the ankle flaps. She got his little jacket. Deep red it was—"blood-color"—Bor called it, and braided with black braid, and around the cuffs and collar there were little fine lines of gold. It was very short, like Gjok's, it did not reach his waist, and in front it spread quite wide apart showing the white cloth of the chemise between.

"You're lovely, Skander," said Bor, and then she tied him in his cradle so he would go to sleep before the guests should come. He cried a minute and then dropped asleep.

Now people knocked at the door, men, and women sometimes with babies fastened on their shoulders in the cradles. Friends in the village these were, and some came from farther off walking a long way to Gimaj. Gjok opened the door for them and greeted them and Dani would come up and give the greetings, too. Then the guests would find places near the fire sitting on the floor cross-legged, or with one knee drawn up in front of them.

Now and then Gjok looked out the door and down the trail.

"Where is Palok?" he said; "it's time he came. He is the most important one of all for it is he will be Komorra to our Skander. I hope no ill fortune keeps him home."

Bor followed Gjok and looked out down the trail as he did. Anxious she felt. What would Skander do—the food all cooking and the people here and yet Palok himself not come to be Komorra to him?

Coffee was served. Gjok made it. Bor watched the little cups, four of them, passed to four guests and then rinsed out and filled again for four other guests. The little brass saucepan with its long handle her father tucked time and again against the red-hot coals, making always more coffee till the last guest was served.

Now Dani took the boiled meat off the fire and hung a pot of meal in its place. Bor watched it thicken up and boil with great sucking bubbles. She knew now that the fire must not be too hot or it would burn, so she put on less wood, letting the hot coals give out their heat not too close to the bottom of the pot. She liked this cooking work and when her mother gave her some butter in a little pan to melt she squatted near her father and set the pan where the warm ashes were. The pale yellow butter

melted down slowly into foamy grease. She carried it back carefully to Dani, not spilling any. Butter was a treat and meant just for a feast like this.

She went to Skander's cradle. There he lay, awake now with his brown eyes open wide. Bor rocked the cradle just a little bit. "You must have patience, Skander." He blinked and clicked his tongue inside his mouth.

Bor patted him and said, "Wait, little eagle, your Komorra comes."

Dani fried the pork. The rich-smelling smoke floated up to the brushwood ceiling and out between the woven boughs and through the thatching of the roof itself.

Bor went once more to the door to watch for Palok. She looked down the trail. Someone was coming. Two people she made out, the first a man; behind him walked a woman, on her back a cradle fastened. Then behind her Bor could see a boy. She looked hard. "He's not a 'little boy,'" she told herself, remembering the words Dani had used yesterday. "He's big, as big as I am, bigger a little maybe."

Behind the boy, led by a bit of rope, a sheep was ambling.

Bor went back inside. Her father by the fire was

pouring out a white drink into two tiny glasses. "Father," said Bor softly, "I think Palok is coming up the trail."

"Good," Gjok answered, and handed the glasses to two of the guests and wished them both good luck. Then he left the fire and went with Bor to the door.

The man and woman and the boy leading the sheep were nearer now. Bor could see the man was tall and fine-looking with a big moustache like Gjok, her father; and he was dressed like all the mountain men in long tight trousers of white wool braided at the seams with wide black braid, and a girdle colored red and green and orange wrapped about him and a white jacket with long sleeves, and over that a shorter one without sleeves of black wool and on the shoulders of it great shaggy fringes like big swellings. On his head he wore the round mountain cap of white felt and on his back from one shoulder his rifle swung.

"That is Palok," said Gjok. Just then Palok saw his friend standing by the door and he quickly unslung his rifle, cocked it, and fired two shots in the air—a greeting.

Bor saw the woman, Palok's wife, more plainly now. She was good-looking, too, and she had on clothes very much like those Bor's mother wore, a

black skirt of stiff wool that swung out about her as she walked along and a long-sleeved jacket of the same cloth, and round her head a kerchief hiding her hair and neck.

"Zina, she is called," Bor's father said.

Now Bor looked eagerly at the boy who followed her. His clothes were just exactly like his father's except that he did not wear the fringed black jacket. They were all near the house now and Bor saw the boy's face, blue-eyed he was and his hair light brown. He smiled as he came up, showing white teeth. "He's just a little taller than I am," thought Bor. "I wonder what he's called."

Now they had reached the door. Bor's father greeted them with hearty words and the question usual in the mountains where the trails were hard: "How have you made the trail?"

Palok replied, "Oh, slowly, slowly; little by little."

"Come inside," invited Gjok. "Coffee and good welcome wait for you."

Palok and Zina and the baby sleeping in her cradle on Zina's back went in.

Bor stood watching the boy. His blue eyes looked a moment into her brown ones. Then he smiled at her. Bor smiled back, saying as her father had: "Long life to you! How have you made the trail?"

And the boy answered as his father had, "Slowly, slowly; little by little."

"Come in," said Bor. "You are welcome, Palok's son."

The boy followed Bor inside, leading the sheep behind him. He tied the rope to the woven wall of the animal pen near the door.

Bor brought a can of water to him. "You are thirsty after such a journey," she said, and held it up for him to drink.

"Thank you," he said, and drank.

They sat down behind all the other people who were crowded by the hearth on every side.

"What is your name?" asked Bor.

"I am called Marash," said the boy. "Marash, Son-of-Palok. What is yours?"

"Bor, Gjak's daughter," answered Bor, smiling.

Marash smiled, too. He gave a little shiver. "Ooo," he said, "what a cold name you have. It must be always winter where you are."

Bor laughed. "It was winter time when I was born," she said. "Mother has told me that the day I came the snow was deep, deep, even in the lowest part of the valley. So she named me Bor, after the snow."

"I have a baby sister," said Marash. "Her name is Lul."

"Then she is like a flower," said Bor, for that was what the baby's name meant in their language.

"What's your baby's name?" asked Marash.

"Skander, we call him," said Bor, "after the greatest hero of Shqyphenia, Skander-Beg. It is a year now since he was born and this feast is for him, the Feast of his Komorra."

"Yes, I know," said Marash. "Palok, my father, comes to cut his hair as the Komorras do, so he will be Komorra to your Skander."

Just then Skander began to cry a little bit. Bor and Marash looked over to his cradle. Dani was picking him up, unwinding all the bindings that tied him to his cradle board. She carried him to where Palok was standing.

"Come," said Marash, "let's go nearer so we can see what my father does."

They both got up and went closer to the fire and the group of people gathered round Dani and Skander. Now Gjok held the baby and Palok took his long knife out of his belt. The baby saw the shiny blade and stopped his whimpering to reach for it. But Palok did not let his hands come near it.

"It's too sharp for Skander to touch," whispered Marash to Bor. "Last night my father sharpened it so it would shave the hair off easily."

Bor moved a little nearer, peeking through the crowd so she could see just what Palok was doing. He set the knife to Skander's hair and with quick strokes began to shave the baby's head, carefully, now on one side, now on the other, not cutting all the hair but only some here and there. In a few minutes he had finished and Bor saw him slip the knife back in his belt. Gjok gave the baby back to his mother. Skander was laughing now as if he knew this fuss was all for him.

Dani sat down and held the baby in her lap. Bor went up close to see his shaven head. Yes, Palok had cut it carefully enough, there were left four lines of uncut hair going across his head from back to front, and from side to side. Bor looked surprised. "Why, Mother," she exclaimed, "the hair that's left makes a cross on his head!"

Marash looked, too. "That means that Palok is Komorra to him now," he said.

Skander put both hands up to his hair and rubbed his head. He laughed. Palok came up to him now leading the sheep that Marash had brought along the trail and tied to the pen wall. Bor understood this

was a present to Skander from his Komorra. Then Palok put a silver piece of money into the baby's hand. Now Gjok came up and gave Palok for himself a fine new goat's hair blanket and a chain of heavy silver like the one he wore himself. All the time words were said, wishes and certain special sets of words that fitted all these doings. Bor heard them, "Long life!" "Good luck!" "Blessings on your house!" And then the feast began.

Such a feast! Bor and Marash watched Dani bring the food and set it on the low round table for the guests to eat. The goat meat and the pork and bread and cheese, and then the cornmeal served in wooden bowls with butter poured on top, and wooden spoons to eat it with. And last she brought wild honey thick and syrupy. This they scooped up with bread. Palok had to have the best of everything since he was most important of them all to-day.

Bor and Marash sat in their corner whispering a little to each other and waiting for their own turn at the feast which would be sure to come when all were through. At last Dani set the table near to them, leaving the guests to smoke and talk beside the hearth. Then she and Gjok sat down and ate with Bor and Marash. How good everything tasted after the long wait.

"Skander's Feast is good," said Marash, fishing the last bit of cornmeal out of his bowl.

"Mmmmm," said Bor, licking her fingers, "wild honey is the best of everything."

Marash dipped up the honey with a bit of bread and then when it was gone he licked off his fingers just as Bor had done. "Mmmmm," he said, smiling at Bor.

Then songs began. Now one guest sang and now another, always holding their own ears one with each hand as they sang. Sometimes two or three would sing together and the little room would be all filled with the high wailing sounds. Marash and Bor sitting in their corner quietly listened to the words. Stories these songs were, stories of bravery and high adventure, great deeds of long ago and yesterday. All true they were, and sometimes the children heard a name they knew, and one song told about Bor's grandfather, they knew that name, and how through his own strength and leadership he had saved all the valley from disaster.

"I like these songs," said Marash, after a long one had been ended. "When the men sing I can see in my head the mountains and the men and marching tribes, and battles."

"I like the song about Vllora and the battle they

had there last summer when the women helped the men win," said Bor. "That time so many men fell wounded that there were not enough to go on fighting. And then the women who had come with food and cartridges took the rifles of the wounded men out of their hands and fought side by side with the rest and won the fight."

"That was a great day," agreed Marash, "I think we mountaineers are strongest of all the people in the world."

"I'm sure we are," said Bor. "Look at my father and yours, too, Marash. They are so tall and strong there is no man could stand against them."

"Some day," said Marash, "I shall have a rifle of my own."

"Yes," Bor said, "you'll have to fight, too, perhaps; and if the battle goes against you and your men I'll come and help just as those women did."

They were silent then, listening to the singing of the men.

After this song some of the guests went home, making their farewells with many words and wishes for Skander's long life and happiness.

The fire burned low. The babies were sleeping soundly. Now the other guests stretched themselves on the floor around the hearth. Bor found a blan-

ket. "Here, Marash, sleep under this to-night," she said.

"Thank you," said Marash. "Good-night, Bor, sleep well. I'm glad I came to Skander's Feast."

"Good-night," said Bor, "I'm glad that you came, too. Rest well, Marash."

Bor went to where her mother lay on a high bed like a shelf woven of branches halfway up the wall. She climbed up and laid herself down by Dani in the dark.

Now all the room was still. Only the sound of breathing and the rustle of a moving sheep or goat broke the still darkness. Once, before Bor slept, a chicken cackled furiously. Her sleepy eyes opened a little. Just a faint red glow showed where the hearth was. All the rest around her was thick blackness of night. She closed her eyes again. Skander's great feast was over. With a happy sigh she dropped to sleep.



CHAPTER VI

THE ROAD TO SKODRA

WINTER had gone and spring had come again. Warm, pleasant days and crocuses blooming in the green grass. Days like these made the mountain trails easy to travel. One night before Bor went to sleep she said to herself, "Now there are yellow roses over the doorways in Skodra and blue iris grow tall in the gardens."

"Wake up, Bor." It was Dani calling. Bor heard her in a sort of dream. It couldn't be morning yet. "Wake up, dreamer, what are you seeing in your sleep that you cannot come back to us?"

Bor sat up rubbing her eyes. "Is it morning, Mother?"

"More than morning, Sleepyhead. Day is here and the sun is coming. We are all going to Skodra to-day; have you forgotten?"

Bor jumped up, throwing off her blanket.

"Oh, Mother," she said, "I saw so many things in the night that I did forget." Bor meant she had been having lots of dreams.

"Go scrub off your face and hands in the stream. We must look shining to-day. At the big town of Skodra we shall meet people of many different mountain tribes, and the lowlanders from the plain villages south, and then, besides, all the Skodrans themselves, and Mussulmans, those whose prophet is Mohammed and who dress in clothes strange and unlike our own. So go and clean your face and wash your hands, for no one of these folk we'll see in the bazaar must say that we mountain people are savage and wild and don't know how to make a good appearance in the street."

Bor ran down to the stream below the house and plunged her hands into the icy water, rubbing them with sand instead of soap to get them clean. Then she leaned down her head and rubbed her face, gasping a little at the cold wetness.

"Father must cut my hair properly, in mountain style," she told herself. "It has grown too long." Back she ran, and taking off the head cloth that she always wore she went to where her father knelt in the dim room fastening up his rawhide moccasins.

"Father, my hair, please trim it for me. I must look neat for all the eyes in Skodra."

Her father had a razor bought long ago in Skodra, much prized and cared for. Sharp it was. He opened it and taking Bor outside in the strong morning sunshine he stood behind her with one hand on her head.

"Stand still, little melon, and I will peel you in good style," he said, smiling.

Bor steadied herself by reaching out her hand to hold to the house wall. She knew how sharp was that steel edge and if she moved she might be cut and Gjok would call her "little donkey" and she would be ashamed. So she stood very still. She hardly felt the light touch of the knife against her hair and head.

He shaved the top quite clean and left a bang in front and two side locks over each ear so when Bor should tie her kerchief on again these would show along the edge of it, hanging flat and neat against her forehead and her cheeks. This was the mountain style of cutting hair for all the little girls. He finished,

closed his razor, saying, "There, now, you are beautiful."

Bor felt her shaved scalp with one hand and set the bang and locks straight and in order. "Let me see myself in your mirror, Father?"

They went inside and Gjok gave her a broken bit of looking glass. It had no frame; its edges were rough and sharp. Bor handled it with care. She went to the open door to get more light and holding up the glass saw herself there, her smooth shaved crown and those three fringes left at front and sides.

"Oh, I look fine!" she said, and sat down on the floor to fix her kerchief. She set the mirror on her knees so she could see herself and wrapped the pointed cloth about her head, fastening it by tucking in the ends without a knot or pin. In back a little point hung down. She twisted round to see it, holding the glass out sideways. Then she smoothed the fringes of her hair. How straight the edges were where Gjok had cut!

"Thank you," she said, and handed back the glass.

Now she smelled cornbread and the strong smell of the white cheese made from goat's milk.

"Eat, Bor," Dani said, "we're starting soon, and a full stomach makes an easy trail. Here is your bread."

Bor ate. So did they all, sitting around the fire.

"Grandmother's coming, too," said Dani. "We have so much to take to the bazaar, she'll help to carry things. Skander, big as he is, must travel on my back, tied in his cradle."

Bor listened.

"After you are through," went on her mother, "you can get that big square of cloth and tie up in it all those rolls of felt I want to sell in Skodra."

"Yes, Mother," answered Bor.

"Gjok must take his gun, of course, but by the Skodra law he has to leave it at the city's edge. He has cornmeal to carry. And you, Bor, do as I tell you now. Go to the pen," Dani motioned to that side of the room where were the animals, "catch two brown hens. They're roosting there now. They are good and fat and I intend to sell them in the market or to trade them for some sugar if I can. You can carry them. Tie up their legs and take one in each hand—you know the way."

Bor swallowed her last piece of bread and looking at Dani slowly moved her head from side to side. This was the mountain way of nodding yes, and Dani understood.

After the cornbread and the cheese were finished everyone made ready for the trip. Dani strapped

Skander's cradle on her back and took her wooden distaff and her spindle and her spinning wool, some fluffy on the distaff and some spun already into thread and wound up on the pointed spindle stick. Bor found the square of cloth and tied the felt up for her grandmother, then held the bundle for her while her grandmother strapped it on her back using strong bands of goat's hair cloth to hold it firm against her.

Gjok from one corner took the sack of meal and slung his rifle over his shoulder. Bor ran to catch her hens. They flapped their wings and squawked as she got hold of them and tied their legs up. She scolded back at them, "Come, sillies, you are going to the bazaar in Skodra. Think what you'll see passing through city streets—it is a treat for silly hens like you."

The two hens stared at her out of their button eyes and flapped their wings again, trying to get away. But Bor knew how to quiet them. Taking them by their yellow legs she turned them upside down. This settled them. They let drop their wings and stopped their struggling, hanging quiet from her hands.

Now they were off! Gjok led the way outside.

Dani with the sleeping Skander followed after him, and then came Bor and last her grandmother.

Her father carried least of all of them but Bor could understand why this was so; he had the gun, and if they met with danger, men from an enemy tribe, he'd have to shoot perhaps. Anyway, his hands and body must be freer than the others' so he could defend himself and them if need arose. She knew, too, that the danger was the greatest for himself for by the old Law of Lek a woman traveled safe on any trail.

In front of her her mother walked, Skander's cradle fastened high up on her back. Bor saw the flat wooden end of her distaff sticking out from underneath her arm. Bor knew her mother would start spinning now and spin all the way in to Skodra, yes, and back. Dani's arms moved. One hand pulled at the fluffy bunch of wool and twisted out a bit of it while the spindle hanging by the thread already spun swung round and round. Bor could see the swelling in the middle of the spindle made by the wound-up thread spun yesterday. As Dani twisted and the spindle twirled—twisting the thread tighter and stronger than her fingers could—the thread ball on the spindle got fatter yet as the new thread was wound around

it. Bor thought, "In just a year or two I'll learn to spin."

Bor swung her hens back and forth as she walked. They did not mind. She could hear the firm steps of her grandmother behind. How strong she was—her grandmother. Bor knew when you were old like Grandmother your legs had walked so many trails and climbed so many hills that you could go on steadier than the rest and not get tired—no, nor out of breath. The years taught you how to go. Yes, Bor went on thinking to herself, her eyes fixed on the path she followed, yes, the years taught people lots of things. Grandmother never talked a lot at home but Bor had heard her call Gjok "son" sometimes, and very often he or someone else would go to her to ask advice; she knew more than any one of them at home. Often she would tell Gjok what to do and he would listen and talk long with her, explaining or excusing something done, or planning some new thing if she agreed.

Bor turned to look at her. She saw the big bundle on her strong old back and saw that as she walked she knitted busily. Bor turned and walked ahead. Yes, to be a grandmother, Bor understood, was to grow more important every day as you grew older. When you had lived so long and seen so much you

knew the thoughts that people had before they told you or before they acted.

"Those are my socks she's knitting on," said Bor to herself happily. Bright worsteds Grandmother had got to make colored designs and markings. They would come just to Bor's knees when they were done. She would love to wear these gay wool stockings all knitted in colored signs belonging to her tribe especially. When she had on these socks no one would think she came from Shoshi valley or Merturi, or Nikai, either—that wild tribe to the north. No, just by looking at the colored markings anyone could tell that Bor belonged to Shala tribe; and everyone knew Shala men were brave and that the Shala women made good wives, who spun and wove all day, and never shirked the hard work of the mountain housekeeping. So Bor was glad her socks were getting done.

Gjok leading, they went down the mountainside, their careful feet not slipping once nor making a misstep. Down, down the slope, and down another slope to where the Shala River splashed and roared in tiny torrents madly over rocks.

A shaky narrow wooden bridge without a hand-rail stretched across the roaring muddy water. Gjok led across and one by one they followed, letting the

one ahead reach land before the one behind stepped on the planks.

Bor felt the wobbly thing trembling under her but felt no fear. She had often crossed this bridge. To-day she looked between the wide-set planks and saw the water rushing by. "It's hurrying so," she said to her grandmother, "to reach the Drin and flow past Skodra. If it goes so fast it will go underneath the Skodra bridge long before we get down to Skodra plain."

Her own feet hurried then. Dani and Gjok she saw a good way off, resting beside a cross set halfway up a steep, steep hill.

Bor climbed and rested, too. But not for long. Skodra was too far away for that.

Long before midday bread, as Bor called lunch, they reached the level plain and saw the city lying by Skodra Lake far in the distance. Bor could see its pointed minarets—those slim white towers of Mohammed's churches—here and there pricking up. And then she made out the bell tower of the Friars' chapel near to the big house where lived the Friars, barefooted and brown-robed, with kind eyes, and smiles for any child who gave them greeting on the city street. So many houses there were there in Skodra, and so many long high walls around them and their shut-in garden trees.

Over the plain walked Gjok and Dani, Bor and her grandmother. There were no hills now, only a straight path that led to the Big Street leading in to Skodra. Tiring it was for mountaineers, such level walking. Bor's knees ached and wanted to bend as she would bend them in climbing up or coming down a hill.

Other mountaineers from other tribes living in other valleys crossed the plain, too, and went toward the town as they did. Greetings went back and forth between the groups. These people, too, were carrying things to sell in the bazaar. Some had wooden kegs and water buckets, and one man carried two long oars to sell to the boatmen on the lake. Everyone was loaded down, Bor saw, just as her people were.

Sometimes a horse went by and seated high up on it, her two feet hanging over on one side as though she sat in a chair, there rode a woman, sometimes veiled, a cloth covering all her face but her eyes. "Mussulman," said Bor, who understood that women like that were obliged by a law of theirs to hide their faces. By the horse's head there walked her husband leading the horse.

Donkeys they saw, too. Funny little beasts, carrying on their backs a child, a woman, or a man, nearly all seated sideways, rarely astride. And sometimes a

donkey passed loaded with a great load; one was quite buried to the ears with a huge mass of green hay. It looked to Bor as if a stack of hay were walking by on four short donkey legs—trot-trot, no head, no tail, just hay on legs.

Now they entered Skodra. Here was a house where policemen lived just on the edge of town. One of the men came out and greeted Gjok politely and took the rifle he unslung from his shoulder. Bor knew that when their marketing was done and they came back this way bound for the mountains the police would give her father's rifle back to him again.

Now they were really in the town of Skodra. What a broad, broad way, broader than any trail. And every house though made of stone was different from a mountain house, more smoothly made, some plastered over with white plaster, and higher usually, with windows that seemed very big to Bor. Most of the walls were white and the roofs red made of little curved tiles laid over one another in a way that made little troughs in lines all down the roof, and Bor had seen the water on a rainy day run down these hollows of the slanting roof in tiny rivers.

Children played by doors and called to Bor, "Hey, mountain girl, how are you?" "Good traveling to your feet, and a long life!" some said. And Bor

called back, "Thank you, long life to you, yourself!" Sometimes they stared at Bor and Bor stared back and heard them whisper, "Look how the mountain children wear their skirts, all swinging out and flaring like a bell—and see those hens she carries."

Bor could see they wore such different clothes. Skirts of red and white, of cotton goods, and white waists trimmed with colors very gay. The boys wore baggy pants or trousers made of a dark woolen cloth. "Frankish clothes," explained Bor's father, "that's the sort of thing the Franks wear."

"Who are they?" asked Bor.

"Oh, they are all the people who come from far away and are not called Shqyptars, Sons of the Mountain Eagle, like ourselves."

"They come to Skodra?" Bor asked curiously.

"Yes, from the land of Franks, from bigger countries, Europe. Even from across the great sea, from America they come," explained Gjok. "They live here a while and show our people other sorts of dress, costumes made of cloth not woven on the looms at home but bought from shops in pieces big enough to sew up into garments."

Bor saw some Skodra women on the street. What bright and colored things these women wore! Red

flaring coats, embroidered gaudily in yellow, green, and blue all down the front; every seam was covered with glossy black braid. And besides they wore fluffy white waists of cloth finer than Bor had ever seen at home, and scarves laced with gold and colors covered their heads, and heavy braided strips of gold some wore across their heads, making a brilliant point low on their foreheads.

Bor gazed at them in admiration. Then she thought how funny it would be to have her mother dressed in things like that. Such clothes would not become a mountaineer, she told herself; they fitted the Skodrans.

Now as they turned into the market street there was a broad space filled with low open carriages and horses fastened in teams to each. A crowd of people, hardly any one dressed like another, moved about the square. Bor saw the mountaineers from other valleys, and then the villagers from south of Skodra with their bobbed hair dyed to a brilliant black and wearing such a bright red and white mingled with yellow in their dress that they looked dazzling in the morning sun. There were Mussulmans, people of Skodra, too, but dressed in clothes all black and wrapped clear up to the eyes. "Underneath these dark, dreary-looking robes," Dani told Bor, "they wear gorgeous

silk dresses of a thousand colors, but they are forbidden by their law to show them on the street."

"Who made their law?" asked Bor, wondering at the strangeness of it all.

"Mohammed was their lawmaker," Dani replied. "Long, long ago he lived and they must still obey the laws he made."

"I know," said Bor, "it's like the mountain law we have ourselves which we obey—the Law of Lek, I mean."

"Yes," said Gjok, who had listened to their talking, "each people has its own law fitting to itself and no one else. That's as it should be, Bor. You see these men all wearing that high red felt cap so different from the white wool bowl-shaped thing we mountain men must wear?"

Bor nodded in the mountain way.

"Well, those men," Gjok went on, "follow the law of Mohammed, too, and they must always wear that little cap, a fez they call it, even when they eat and when they sleep."

Bor looked at one of these who passed them now, his fez set firmly on his short brown hair. She said to Gjok, "Skodra has as many different kinds of people in it as there are pebbles in the Shala River."

They stood a moment in the carriage square and

Bor peered up at one driver near her. He sat high on a raised seat near to his horses and the city people that were in his carriage sat lower down behind him. Bor looked at them—a man, a woman, and a little girl all dressed in city clothing.

“Those poor Skodrans,” thought Bor, “they are not strong like us. If they go far they must have wheels like these to carry them along.” Off drove the carriage, going toward the market. Bor and her father, mother, and grandmother went on behind them, walking steadily.

They passed a low white building domed and whitewashed. On one side it had a tall white tower, slim like a needle, tapering to a point.

“A mosque,” said Bor.

Dani said, “On Fridays all the Mussulmans go in that church to pray, for Friday is their Sunday.”

Bor looked, bending back her head to see the pointed top of the minaret. A little balcony ringed it way up near the top and as Bor looked she saw a man come out, white-robed, a cloth wound round his head, and stand there for a minute. Then he called out words in a singing voice, words Bor could not make out.

“What is he doing, Father?” questioned Bor.

“He is a sort of priest,” Gjok told her, “and every

now and then he comes out there and calls to all the followers of Mohammed to pray and love only the true God."

Bor watched the man who moved to another side of the tower and called again, and then taking a third place did the same thing a third time. She heard the high, far sound.

"Look out, Bor!" Her grandmother seized her arm suddenly and Bor's eyes left the minaret and looked ahead of her. Then she moved quickly to one side of the road. A mountaineer was coming toward them and behind and all around him was a flock of sheep, their woolly backs so close to one another that as Bor looked across all she could see was moving, moving sheep, no street at all.

The shepherd greeted Gjok and Dani and the grandmother, "Good luck! Long life! God prosper Shala tribe!" They answered him, and Gjok told Bor, "He is one of us and goes now up to Shala. All those sheep he's taking from a village on the far side of Skodra."

Bor heard the tap-tap of the little hoofs on the cobblestones that paved the road. So many little hoofs, and such a hundred little tappings! Once they were gone by the sound of them came to Bor's ears almost like water rippling over stones.

A fine, straight, handsome man the shepherd was, his head wrapped neck and ears in snowy cloth wound round his mountain cap, and his moustache as long and flowing as her father's own. Bor smiled at him and saw admiringly the heavy silver chain he wore fastened over his broad strong chest.

Now they were on the lake shore. To their right stretched mile after mile of water. This was Skodra Lake. Bor knew the name. High mountains lay across—"Mount Tarabosh that big one over there," said Dani, motioning across the lake. Bor saw a road like a thin streak cutting the side of it.

"Not very long ago they made that road," said Gjok, "because there was a war and soldiers marched along Mount Tarabosh."

Bor saw boats on the lake, long shallow boats for rowing. And she saw another sort of boat, high-sided, bigger. "Look, Father," she said, surprised, "look there, it looks like a little house and at one side stands up a sort of chimney such as the city houses have and smoke comes out."

"That is a steamboat," Gjok said, "and it goes without any oars. Fire and steam are in it and somehow wheels turn as water turns the little mill in Shala where our corn is ground, and so it moves all of itself."

Bor gazed enchanted at the queer boat that knew how to push its own self across the lake.

"Come, Bor," said Dani, "your eyes have made your feet forget to walk. Come, then, for only a few minutes more will see us in the bazaar."





CHAPTER VII

BOR AT SKODRA BAZAAR

NOW they neared what was called Old Skodra, a part of the town built years and years ago. Here were the shops and here in the streets and in the open places was held the market. People from all over, from the mountains and the plains, brought things to sell as Bor and her own people had done to-day. Wednesday it was, Bazaar Day people said. Bor loved Bazaar Day—crowds of people dressed all gay and differently and streets jammed with things they had carried down to Skodra to set out for sale.

Now they were passing all the city shops on the way to reach the market square. Slowly they went so Bor had time to look at everything.

These shop rooms were like big boxes open at one side close to the road where people walked. You passed so close that you could touch the things inside them and you could step right in anywhere—there were no doors. Inside there were no shelves nor chairs. Bor would have been surprised to see such things. Shopkeepers sat cross-legged on the floor and made with their own hands the things they sold.

Dani stopped by one shop. This was the place where they made leather belts for mountain women. Dani wanted to buy one for the one she wore was out of shape and dingy. These belts were made of a wide strip of heavy dark leather and glittered with bright nailheads set into the leather solidly, hundreds of them, close together all along the strip.

Three men sat on the floor of the tiny room and worked at making the belts. One man held the belt and studded it with tiny shining nails, sticking them in pierced holes and tapping them with a small hammer. On the under side he bent the nails to hold them in tight. And one man crouched over a tiny charcoal fire heating the lead the nails were fashioned of. Bor saw the little pot he had to hold the melted metal. Like a thick silver syrup it appeared. Bor leaned to see. On the floor near were little molds of wood, blocks with hollows cut in them the shape

of nails. As Bor watched, the man poured out the lead into one of these molds. It ran like honey, filling up the holes, and then he lifted the mold and plunged it into water to cool the lead. And when the mold was opened there lay half a dozen little nails ready to fit into the belts. Some that were not well shaped the man tossed back into the little pot to melt again, and all the good ones he picked out and put into a little wooden box lying near the man who worked with them. Bor peered into the darkness at the back of the little room. There the third man worked, cutting the leather to the proper size.

Her mother chose a belt and paid for it with silver coins that Gjok had in his girdle. Bor felt how stiff and heavy the belt was and rubbed her finger over the nailheads set so thickly on it. Three little straps and buckles fastened it. But Dani did not put it on. Instead, she tucked it in her blouse to carry home.

They went on past. Here was a shop where they made slippers. Over the heads of the men working there hung strips of red and black leather and on the floor lay wide tan sheets of it. Bor saw pieces of wood carved to the shape of feet, all sizes, children's feet and bigger ones.

"What do you do with all those wooden feet?" she asked the shoemakers.

"We wet the leather till it bends easily for it is very thick and stiff at first," one of the men replied, "and then we fit and sew it over these wooden feet to make it just the size we need for different people."

Pretty these slippers were, trimmed with the red and black and studded here and there with brass nailheads.

"Try one on," the man invited her.

Bor thrust her foot into a small one. The toe was pointed and curled up a bit at the tip. As Bor stood in it all her own toes were crunched into a point. "Ouch! ouch!" she cried, and took it off quickly. "That is not a shoe for mountaineers."

The man laughed, and hung the slipper with its mate before the shop.

They walked on.

Now they came to where cradles were made. Bor looked at these, delighted.

"Oh, what lovely fancy cradles!" she cried, "not plain like Skander's."

These cradles were of wood and very much the shape of the one Dani carried on her back, shallow with a curved strip that roofed the baby's head. But these were covered over with the gayest flowers painted on the wood, all red and blue and yellow, blossoms and stems and leaves and curlycues. "Oh,

what darling things!" said Bor, her eyes lit up with pleasure.

One man sat on the floor and held the cradle between his knees, painting on the flowers and the waving lines and making big splashes of bright color here and there. Bor watched his brush. She thought, "I'd like to be that man and make those pictures just as I wanted them, bright colored flowers blooming on the wood."

Back in the shop she saw the cradle maker cutting the wood and shaping all the parts that made the cradle.

They walked on. Here a man sat making saddles out of strong rounded bars of wood. He bound the bars together with a rope to hold them in a shape to fit the back of horse or donkey. Bor had often seen these saddles on the animals; Gjelosh's donkey wore one. To sit on such a hard seat you must always lay a blanket on so that those wooden bars would not go grinding into you as the horse or donkey jogged along the rough paths.

"Clang! clang!" What was that noise? a sort of ringing music? Bells like the Friars' bell they sounded in Bor's ears, bells ringing out together. No, they weren't bells at all. Someone was hammering, striking metal on metal somewhere.

Oh, what a dark street! And all that clanging

sound came out of it. "What are they doing down that street?" Bor asked of Gjok.

"That is the 'Street of the Coppersmiths,'" said Gjok. "There copper jars are made for heating water in or cooking beans; and plates for fruit, and trays for coffee cups—such things."

This street led off to one side of the main street of shops and was so narrow, so shut in by all the high house walls, that Bor could scarcely make out in the shadows there what all the men were doing; only she heard the sound of all their hammers beating the shining metal into shapes.

She heard, "Clang-clang, ding-dong," a score of little hammers hitting all at once.

Bor and her grandmother followed after Gjok and Dani who turned into this dark alley of the smiths. All about men hammered on bright copper. Sheets of the shining metal Bor could see leaning against the walls or lying on the low tables the men worked on. Some of these were square and some shaped in big circles. There were lots of copper pots and jars. Bor saw them everywhere—bowls and plates and little covered pitchers for coffee water. How could those men, Bor wondered to herself, make jars and bowls out of flat copper pieces, sheets of it? But that was what they did.

Bor watched a man take a flat piece and hammer on the edge and all along it till it changed its shape, curving itself into a bowl as he tap-tapped it with his little hammer, turning it all about this way and that as he beat hard and fast. Even as Bor watched it changed still more. The man thrust up against the bowl an iron stick and beat the softer metal against this. Now the bowl edges curled in and Bor could see them lengthening into a long bottle neck slowly as the man hammered carefully. He struck so many blows, some light, some heavy, and the vase shape changed, until Bor saw it was a coffee water pitcher, a spout bent out at one side of the rim.

"Now it needs a handle and a cover, too," said Bor aloud to her grandmother beside her.

"Come," her father called her, "we must go on. That man must start work on another piece to make the cover and then must rivet on an iron handle. It will be a long time before he finishes. Meanwhile, the market business waits for us."

They all went on. They reached the upper square.

Thick, thick it was with people and the goods they had carried into Skodra. One side sat women, eggs and cabbages and other vegetables and fruits spread out around them. Bor could see pieces of goat's cheese swimming in wooden tubs of salty

water, and cornmeal in sacks such as her father had, and melons, too, in piles.

Dani unstrapped Skander's cradle from her back and sat down in a clear space among these women, greeting them. Skander was awake and Dani drew back his covers some but left him tied there safe and he was content enough looking around him. Then Dani took the hens that Bor held and Gjok leaned down and set the sack of meal beside her. She said to Bor, "Go on with Grandmother and find the street where cloth is sold. Follow the road that leads above the square over the little bridge."

Gjok left them to join a group of mountain men who stood near smoking cigarettes stuck in long silver holders and talking together.

Bor and her grandmother walked off together through the crowded streets of the bazaar.

Bor's eyes could hardly look enough there was so much to see. She saw women sitting on the cobbled street with scarves of many colors spread for sale, and mountain women selling mountain slippers like Bor's own shputa, knitted and some trimmed with gold thread "in writing," thought Bor, looking close at the bright designs.

She saw a man who had fashioned out of tin dozens of shining buckets, cups, and mugs, with spouts and

handles some of them, like pots and pitchers. And he had tin boxes divided in the middle by a piece of tin, and opening at both ends. Bor knew what those were for. Coffee you put in one end and sugar in the other, two boxes in one box. So many things the man had set around him as he sat cross-legged in the center of them all.

All kinds of people passed them, some they knew, other mountain people from their own tribe and from the other tribes. Again Bor saw the villagers from the farmlands south of town all dazzling in their clean white and red, their jet-black hair showing in long locks at each side of their white head scarves.

"They all dye their hair," explained her grandmother. "That is the law for them, and young and old must have those crow-black locks each side." Veiled women passed, some hiding even their eyes under a netting thinner than the cloth that hid their faces. Others wrapped in red and white cotton shawls over head and shoulders held open just a slit that showed one eye. "How can they see to walk?" asked Bor. Grandmother answered, "They are not mountain folk and so they do not need to go on rough trails where stumbling would be easy dressed like that."

They climbed a street that led across the bridge

Dani had spoken of and here sat women selling different kinds of cloth. Here Grandmother knelt down and undid the bundle of white woolen strips in heavy rolls. These she set out in order so that passers-by going to and from the square would see and maybe stop to buy from her. Then she took out Bor's socks and knitted, waiting for a customer and Bor, tired now, sat herself down beside her.

"Here," said her grandmother, drawing from her blouse the bread and cheese for midday eating, "eat some of this to cure your tired legs. Good appetite!" Bor thanked her and gladly munched down the yellow bread and bit great bites out of the hunk of cheese.

Then after she had satisfied herself she sat watching all the people that went by.

She heard her name, "Bor, greetings to Bor, Gjok's daughter!"

She looked around. Three steps away from them stood a little boy showing his white teeth in a smile at Bor's surprise. Marash it was, Marash, Palok's son.

He came up to them, greeted both of them, and took a bit of lunch Bor offered him, thanking her for it.

"Palok, my father, brought me in with him. He's

gone now to buy coffee," he explained. "What good luck to find you, Bor."

"Indeed it was," Bor answered.

Grandmother said, "You two can go together if you like and see all that there is to see in the Bazaar. There is down there food in plenty for your curious eyes."

"I'd love to go," said Bor, "and Marash here can be the guide. He knows these streets and corners better than I do probably."

"Good," said Marash, "I'll show you everything. Come on," and he turned toward the little bridge that led back to the market place.

Bor went with him, waving her hand good-bye to Grandmother as she reached the corner.

"I'll show you first," she said, "the places that I know about."

And then she led Marash back along the road they had come on, and she made him stop at every shop where she had stopped before and at each one she showed him all the things she'd seen herself.

"Now I'll show you some shops," said Marash, leading her off on a side street.

He stopped before one that had in front a high table shelf and set out on it fezzes and mountain hats of white felt.

"See," pointed Marash, "there is a mountain cap just like the one I'm wearing."

Bor saw it, like a little white fuzzy bowl turned upside down.

They watched the man working. He took a circle of the stiff woolen fabric, soapy and wet it was, and fitted it down tight onto a mold shaped like the top of a man's head. Then, to Bor's surprise, he shaved off the fuzzy wool, using a razor like the one Bor's father had at home.

"Look, Bor," Marash led her on, "here they sell blankets, saddle cloths, and such, made out of brown goats' hair. Feel this rope." Bor felt it. Smooth it was. "This man said that they made rope out of the hair, too."

"Our goats must have strong hair on them," said Bor in wonder.

Marash took her to another shop. "This man in here's a friend of mine," he said. "He sells these leather donkey whips braided of thin strips of leather, see?"

Bor saw the whips in different colors hanging all in a line along the ceiling of the little store. Each was about as long as her own arm and tasseled at the end. "I have one red and black at home," said Marash, giving greeting to the shopkeeper who knew him.

A boy went by them. In his hand he carried a round tray with long handles reaching up above it. Set on the tray were three small cups of coffee, cups without handles, made that way, like little bowls. Bor and Marash had never seen cups different from these. The boy walked fast along the street swinging the tray a bit but spilling not a drop of the black hot coffee.

"I'd like to be a coffee boy," said Marash to Bor, "just to see if I could swing the tray like that and not spill anything."

The coffee boy had heard him. "Here, take this and try," he said, "I'll let you carry it. Be careful now."

Marash took hold of the long branching handle, took a step, and saw the coffee jiggle in the cups.

"Just let it swing gently," said the coffee boy, smiling a little.

Marash tried again. The cups stayed steady. "Now I'm doing it!" he cried.

"Come this way," motioned the coffee boy, "here are the men who ordered me to bring it."

Marash saw three men of Skodra seated on the ground under a little roof that jutted out over the street. He passed the coffee tray to each of them politely.

Each man thanked Marash, taking up the cup he offered. One looked up at him, smiling. "Since when have mountaineers taken to selling coffee?"

Marash smiled back, knowing the man was poking fun a little. He looked down at his trousers made of white wool tight fitted in the mountain style.

"My clothes have told you I am Maltsor," he said. "Well, they have told the truth. Only to-day I take a taste of being coffee boy in Skodra."

"And when to-morrow comes?" asked the man.

Marash answered: "When to-morrow comes I shall be high above your city herding my goats and I will not know how to carry coffee trays at all."

"That is right enough," the man said, sipping coffee from the tiny cup. "Mountain heads do mountain business best. Good luck to you and the wild men of Shala tribe."

"Good luck to you, Skodran," returned Marash, and off he went. Bor, who all this time had kept near him, now caught up with him.

They walked back to the market square passing a shop where a fire burned red and hot. "Here is the blacksmith," Marash said to Bor; "he makes iron things, ax blades, and bigger knives that some men fasten to a stick and use for plowing ground as we use wooden plows."

Bor saw the blacksmith holding with iron tongs a red-hot piece of metal. He raised a big hammer. Down it came, ringing on the metal that he had set on top an anvil. How the iron rang! It sang inside Bor's ears—"Ding-dong-ding, ding-dong!"

On the children walked.

"See this man here," Bor called Marash to look; "he carries a round tray on top of his head, balancing it, and in his hand he has three long thin sticks. What is he selling?"

"I don't know," puzzled Marash. "Watch him, Bor. He's setting up those sticks like table legs spread out at the ends and tied together in the middle."

Bor and Marash went close to where the man stood.

The tray the man was carrying on his head he took off now and set it like a table top on the spread ends of the standing sticks. Now it was just as high as Bor's nose from the ground and Marash's chin reached to its edge. They both peered over the rim to see what was on it. What did they see? All sorts of colored fruits shining with coats of melted sugar, some stuck on sticks to hold by.

"These are sugared fruits and candies," said Marash; "I know now what they call this man who sells them, 'the sweetmeat peddler.'"

"Oh," said Bor, and licked her lips. "They would taste good and sweet like mountain honey."

"Better than that maybe," said Marash.

"Ask him for a bit," Bor whispered.

"You have to buy the things he sells," said Marash, "pay for them, I mean."

Bor looked again at the tray of sweets, standing tiptoe.

"I have a string of seven little beads," she said.

"My mother gave them to me for my own. I have them now around my neck. Ask him, Marash, if he will give us that red candied apple for seven beads."

Marash asked the candy seller. "Will you give us the red candied apple for seven beads?"

"Beads are no use to me," said the man, smiling at the two, "but I would give that apple to anyone who brought me a good hot cup of coffee."

"I know where they sell coffee," said Marash; "I'll fetch you some. Come, Bor."

They ran off back to where the coffee maker filled cups of coffee for the boy's tray.

"We have sold a cup of coffee for you, Coffee Boy," said Bor; and Marash told their errand to their friend.

The boy gave the round tray to Marash with a cup

of coffee set on it. "Here," he said, "and bring me what the man pays you for it."

Off they went, Marash swinging the tray as he had done before.

"Don't spill it," cautioned Bor.

The candy peddler thanked them, gave Marash a copper coin to give the coffee boy, and while he sipped the coffee slowly from the cup Bor and Marash ran back to pay the boy.

"I'll come and get the cup from him," the boy told Marash.

So the children went back for the candy they had bargained for.

The candy man lifted the tray of sweetmeats, setting it on the ground for them to choose their candy.

Bor and Marash bent over it. Such lovely looking things as they saw spread before them. Candied figs and dates and bits of melon, cherries, and apples.

"Shall we take this, or this—or this—or this?"

They hardly could decide.

And then that first red sugared apple looked more delicious than anything else so Bor pointed to it and said, "That one has thickest sugar on it, Marash, let's choose it, after all."

Marash agreed, and then the candy man handed it to him by the little stick that it was stuck on. Thank-



THE CANDY MAN



ing him then the two walked off in the direction of the square, Marash carrying the candied apple.

"First you bite, Bor, then I'll take my turn," he said, and held the sweetmeat out to her.

"No, no, you carried him the coffee, Marash. You bite first," Bor answered.

"Very well, then," and Marash bit into the apple. "Oh, it is sweet, Bor, sweeter than mountain honey. Here." He held the stick to her.

Bor took her bite. "Umm—it is good," she said.

So they took turns and soon the apple and its sugar coat had disappeared and mouths and fingers were licked off carefully to get the very last taste.

Then Marash looked to where the sun showed in the western sky over Mount Tarabosh. "It's late, Bor. We must find your grandmother and get ready for the journey back. My father will be looking everywhere for me. Abate is so far that we must spend the night with friends who live halfway."

Then together, side by side, they trotted steadily until they reached the market square again. The crowd was not so thick as it had been and Bor found Dani easily. She had no meal and the two hens were nowhere to be seen. She had fed Skander and he was asleep.

"I've sold everything," her mother said to Bor,

"and I have here salt for our bread and sugar for our coffee."

Marash said good-bye. "Good-bye, Marash," Bor answered. "May your trail be smooth on your way home to-night! When you see my grandmother on the upper road tell her we're coming."

Marash ran off.

Gjok came up to them. He carried with him two small tin pails and one bright blade of heavy iron to fasten into his ax handle at home.

Dani set Skander's cradle on her shoulders, tying it firmly as before. They all three then took the road leading up, and on the little bridge they met Grandmother coming to find them.

"I've sold all but two rolls of felt," she said, "and those can go to make an Easter skirt for Bora." She felt inside her blouse and drew out a colored scarf. She shook it out and kneeling spread it over her knee. "See, Bor, your old grandmother has found a scarf for Bor to wear St. George's Day at Iballje."

Bor looked delighted. "Oh, Grandmother, a hundred times thank you! It is lovely. See, Mother, it is all red roses painted on the cloth with dark green leaves." She fingered it, touching the printed

flowers. The edge was bordered with a wide black stripe.

"Look, Father," Bor took Gjok by the sleeve, "on my scarf are red and black, the colors of the flag we saw flying from the house where lives the chief man of Skodra."

"Red and black," said Gjok, "those are the colors for this land we live in. On the red flag we saw was a black mountain eagle and we are all called, as you know, Bor, Children of the Eagle. So your scarf will mark you with red and black and you cannot forget you are the Eagle's Child, swift, brave, courageous, as the other children of that great bird."

Bor's face shone with pride and happiness. She remembered a little rhyme and said it now,

"Kuq e zi
Per Shqypeni."

It meant "Red and black for Albania."

She folded up the scarf, giving it a little pat at last. She tucked it in her waist and then taking her grandmother's hand a moment she pressed it to her forehead. "Thank you with all my heart," she whispered softly.

Grandmother took her hand and they walked to-

gether following Gjok and Dani out of the market down the street along the lake shore.

Bor felt a little sleepy now after the long day, seeing so many things, doing so much.

Porter women passed them carrying loads of goods strapped to their backs—purchases of Skodra people they were taking into the main town. Some were mountain women, one or two of them from Bor's own tribe. They lived in Skodra now and earned a living carrying things to people's homes like this.

Mountaineers walked along with Bor's family. They had come in to trade at the Bazaar and now were going back to their own valleys in the hills. Some were relatives of Gjok's or Dani's and there were children with them Bor had seen before. Everyone walked slowly but steadily and no one talked a great deal. At the carriage square they all turned into the Big Street leading to the mountains. Bor saw the mountains lying far ahead. They seemed to rise up at the end of the street, blocking the way.

Over the plain and each to his own trail. Bor and her people walked along silently. She felt drowsy now and half asleep. She set her feet one before the other on the familiar trail. Once when they all sat by a cross to rest she dropped off and Dani shook her awake as they were leaving. After that her father

lifted her and carried her on his back. She held on sleepily.

It was quite dark when they reached Shala valley. Bor munched her cornbread lying on her blanket in the corner. Munching, she fell asleep, one hand clutching her colored scarf. In her dreams she saw the great black eagle of Albania flapping huge wings and flying high into the blue, blue sky that seemed to stretch over Mount Tarabosh above the lake.





CHAPTER VIII

MARASH, SON-OF-PALOK

BRRR, brrr," called the little goatherd, Marash, making his way through the green thorny bushes. The goats loved these bushes. Their long, shaggy brown coats caught on the thorns but they did not care so long as they could stand on their hind legs and, pawing with their forefeet against the bush, nibble the tender green leaves at the top.

"Brrr, brrr, brrr, come along there, come along," said Marash.

The setting sun sank behind the hills and vanished. The mountains behind Marash took on a rosy color.

He and the goats followed the path to a rough wooden bridge and now they walked on over it.

Marash was dressed the way all the little boys in his village were dressed. Long white wool trousers, braided on the seams with broad black braid—last Easter his mother had finished them—a rough homespun shirt wound at the waist with a gayly colored sash, and a tiny white felt skullcap around which he had twisted a dingy cloth to keep the midday sun from the back of his neck. He carried a stick and now and then he poked the goats with it, but mostly he coaxed them along by making the burring sound with his lips and calling to them.

From the bridge Marash could see the scattered stone houses and the rough thatched roofs of his village and his own house standing a little higher than the others where the mountain sloped from the river.

He hurried. He poked a lazy goat. He was hungry. It was nice to be going home at sunset sure of corn-bread and goat's cheese and perhaps, if there were guests, a fresh-killed chicken or even a kid.

Marash and the goats took the crooked stony road into the village. Other boys were bringing in their goats. He greeted them as ceremoniously as his father greeted his friends: "Long life to you! Are you comfortable and at peace?"

He drove his goats up the slope to his house door and then in through the door itself and to one side of the dark lower room where he penned them behind a wicker fence work. Then he climbed the stone steps leading to the upper story.

This upper part was all one room with a rough wooden floor. Through the big cracks between the boards the smell and sound of the animals came up. But this seemed very natural and cozy to Marash. Everybody kept animals in the house. Moreover, much fresh air came in through the badly built walls and through the tiny windows that were holes without panes and closed only when the family slept.

The cold mountain night had set in and Marash shivered a bit as he went up to the fire. The fire was built in the center of the room on a sort of raised hearth of earth; and the bright flames of the blazing faggots which his big sister had just piled on shot up like a slim tower nearly to the low brushwood ceiling hung with black and furry festoons of soot from years and years of fires.

How comfortable it all looked to Marash! He could hear his mother somewhere in the half darkness stirring up cornmeal and water for the evening's bread. His father and two friends, tall handsome men all three, were sitting on little low three-



INTO THE VILLAGE



cornered stools close to the hearth. Marash could see the tiny saucepan with coffee that his father had just tucked against the red ashes at the fire's edge.

Against the wall stood the carved wooden cradle that Marash always remembered seeing, that he himself had been tied in long before he could remember anything. To-night he passed near it to see if Lul was asleep. Lul was a nice baby and always had a smile for him. But to-night she was sleeping, tied as all her brothers and sisters had been tied before her, her hands and arms bound against her and her body and legs lashed firmly to the stiff board that stuck out beyond the end of the cradle. Her mother loved her and she wanted Lul to be straight and strong and she was sure that no child who was not tied day and night in just this way could ever grow up with straight back and legs; so she fastened Lul down carefully and tightly and Lul was used to it and seldom cried.

Marash sat down by the hearth. He drew off his goatskin moccasins and bright-colored woolen slippers and socks that Pren his big sister had knitted so firmly and well. His father, who had just handed to his friends the tiny coffee cups without handle or saucer and wished them long life and good fortune, picked up Marash's damp moccasins and socks and

reaching easily to the ceiling he hung them a little to one side of the fire beside his own big ones to dry.

Marash stretched his toes to the flames. His mother poured the bread batter into a round flat pan and covering it with another she was now putting it in the ashes to bake. Marash watched her as she piled the red embers on the top. He knew it would be done soon and be taken out brown and steaming with the mark of the cross on its under side. For bread in the mountains was a serious and sacred thing and no loaf in a Christian family was baked without this holy sign on one side of it. Marash knew this and he knew he must be very careful of bread. If he dropped a piece on the floor he always picked it up quickly and pressed it to his lips and forehead, first one and then the other, as fast as he could several times, and he always felt a little bit ashamed of such carelessness.

A hen was squawking downstairs. "Oh, Pren is cutting a hen!" thought Marash. He meant she was killing it, but he used the word that all his people used when they meant an animal was being killed to eat.

The great iron hook over the fire was empty but very soon his mother hung a black pot of water on

it and, just as he thought, in went the hen, piece after piece, and the water bubbled merrily.

The heat made him sleepy and he slipped over to where his father was sitting and leaned against his knee.

He was waked by his father's voice, "Make room for the table, Marash," and he saw his mother setting the low round wooden table at the knees of his father and the two men who had left their stools and were sitting cross-legged on the floor.

The cornbread was baked and three huge steaming pieces were set one before each man. A bowl of wet white cheese smelling strongly and deliciously in Marash's nostrils was set in the middle and the men began to eat.

Marash watched. He was hungry but not impatient. It never occurred to him that he could eat before the guests had eaten.

Eggs next, a sort of omelette in a central bowl. The men used bits of bread to pick up the hot food. Each ate carefully from that part of the bowl in front of him and each left some. Marash knew they would. Then the hen not too hot, because there were no knives and forks and it had to be picked from the steaming bowl with the fingers.

Marash listened intently when one of the men

after sprinkling the breastbone of the fowl with crumbs held it to the firelight to read from it the fate and fortune of the house and family.

"Good comes to you," he said. "Surely a member of your house shall gain great wisdom." Marash always liked to hear the fortunes. He wondered about this one.

The men left some chicken, of course. His mother, his sister, and himself had yet to eat.

His mother took away the little table and swept the crumbs into the fire. The men lit their cigarettes. The long silver holders with a great amber ball at the end of each glistened in the dim light. They settled back to smoke and talk.

And now Pren was bending over him with a can of water. Marash knew it was time to eat. He held out his hands. The water ran over them and fell soaking steamily into the dirt hearth. He wiped them on his head cloth which he had unwound and tucked into his girdle.

The table was set farther from the fire this time so as not to disturb Palok and his guests. Zina and the big sister Pren sat by it each leaning on one knee drawn up against her in the fashion of women. Marash sat near and took what they gave him or reached in as they made room. A good supper and

plenty. Marash munched the coarse bread with relish. He dipped the eggs out of his side of the bowl. He would have liked more eggs, but the rest were Pren's and his mother's. It never occurred to him to eat over a little farther into their part. All his nine years he had seen people eat like this and he had never seen anyone try to get more than his share.

Even when he ate with his little boy-and-girl cousins and no grown-ups were at the table each was very careful of the other's rights. And they seldom quarreled. If they did they seldom struck each other. A blow was a very serious thing in these mountains. He knew men had been shot year after year in a feud between one family and another, all because long ago one man had insulted another by striking him. And only last year his uncle had had to pay a lot—a whole bag it was—of silver kronin to another man because his uncle's little boy and the other man's son had had a fight and had hurt each other quite badly. His uncle had been much displeased about it all. He had not wanted to pay the kronin. He was not sure his own son was to blame, but the council had said he must. Marash had seen the council, sixteen of them, eight from his own family who talked for his uncle's side and eight from the other family, all sitting quietly in a circle in a broad green

field early last spring. They had decided how much his uncle must pay and his uncle had paid.

Yes, a quarrel was bad, and hitting anyone—that was pretty serious, too serious, unless it was just fun and battling with the other goatboys while the goats drank at the river.

Marash went back to the fire, sucking a chicken bone. He seated himself opposite his father and the two friends. He was not sleepy any more and he wanted to sit where he could watch their faces as they talked. They were talking very earnestly; it was something important.

Marash always listened by the fire. Sometimes he heard very interesting things. Often he heard both sides of a village dispute about land or animals and sometimes he would decide which side was the right side, but he never said anything. When he was big and tall like his sixteen-year-old cousin Nush, and could carry a gun and talk with the men, then he would tell them which side he thought was right. Until then he would listen. Sometimes there were old stories of long ago, of his grandfather, of trouble and fighting. Marash listened. Best of all there was the singing. Such great stories as one heard in the songs! Names he knew, sometimes even names of men who had stayed a night at his father's house. Men

who had done brave things and men who had done shameful things and betrayed their people.

And there was one thing that Marash had learned at the fire when he was very, very young. He found it was a great sure law of his people, and it could not be broken for shooting or for money. It was called a "bessa" and it meant a promise, your given word. Among his people once you had given your word it could never be broken. There was a proverb, "A cow is tied by the horns but a man by his word." And once you had given your word you could not get away from it any more than the cow could get away when the rope was round her horns.

To-night Marash listened and watched the faces of his father and the two men. One of the men, the blue-eyed one, was speaking.

"Yes, it is true," he was saying. "They are going to make a school in Thethi. There will be room for fifty children. I'm going to send my boys."

The other man spoke. He had a long thin face and his dark eyes shone above his long black moustache. "Well, I've no son—yet," he sighed a little—sons were very important in the mountains—"but I'm going to send Lukja. She must be ten and she's a good smart girl. She'll take her knitting and her mother can manage at home without her."

Palok looked at Marash. His eyes swept over him, proud and glowing. Marash straightened himself a little. He loved to have his father look at him like that.

"By Heaven," he said. He had a big deep voice. Marash liked to hear him talk when he was in earnest. He thought neither of the other men was as tall nor as strong as his father and neither had such a flowing and handsome moustache. "By Heaven," said Palok again, "my boy is going!"

Marash wondered where it was he was going. What was a school and what did you do there? He was sure it was a very wonderful thing else his father would never have spoken of it in such a tingling voice.

Marash looked into his father's eyes—gray, steady eyes they were. There was fire in them now. He turned to the man next him. "Do you know," he said seriously, quietly, "I'd give everything I own, my fields and animals, this house, everything I have in the world, if I could read from a book and write."

Marash did not know what real reading and writing were but he thought he understood his father because Palok used for the word "read" the mountain word "sing"—there was no other word in the mountains for "read." And for "write" he used the word that meant to Marash "draw" or "design"

—the same word Pren used when she embroidered his woolen shputa with gold thread on the instep.

How funny, thought Marash, that his father wanted to draw pictures like the ones Pren made on his shputa; and as for singing—why, Palok could sing wonderfully. Marash was puzzled. But he did not say anything. Children never asked questions at the fire when men and women were talking. If you did not understand you listened until something was said that explained things, and if nothing was said—well, you just remembered and listened the next day harder than ever.

Palok was speaking again, slowly, seriously. His face was sad. "Look at me. I am not a poor man." He touched the silver chain hanging on his chest. "I can use a gun as bravely as anyone when I must, but"—he put his hand to his forehead, a fine forehead it was—"I know nothing."

Marash gave a little involuntary catch of the breath. What was this his father was saying? He knew nothing? His father? Palok? Why, there was not a man in the valley who knew more than he did. Of course there was not. That was why Marash felt so proud when anyone called him by his full name, "Marash, Son-of-Palok." Was not his father always on the important councils and a friend of the "Bair-

aktor"—the chief of all the villages in the valley? And here he was, sitting by his own fire and before his own guests, saying as seriously as if he meant it with all his heart, "I know nothing." Marash could not believe his ears.

"If I could read and write." Marash listened. The men were talking about the priest in the next village. "He is the only man in the valley who can read and write," they said.

Then this reading was not just singing. Marash remembered about the priest. He had been to the church last St. Mark's Day and he had seen the priest looking at a big book and "singing" words. So that was "reading." And writing? Marash listened.

"Yes," said the dark man, "I was there one day when the priest got a piece of paper sent him by the Archbishop. And he opened that paper and looked at it and then at me and said, 'The Bishop has sent word about your sister's trouble.' And he explained everything to me from that paper that the Archbishop had marked with black ink. He wrote a letter for me then to my sister. All the words that I said he wrote so my sister knew what I wanted her to do."

Now at last Marash understood. Reading and writing. It wasn't just singing and embroidering slippers.

It was knowing what somebody hours and days away had thought. Perhaps you might never see that somebody but you could tell what he thought or what he wanted from the paper, just from the marks on the paper.

Marash pondered. Yes, his father was a very wonderful man but he could not do that. And it flashed over Marash why his father had looked at him in that proud longing way. His father wanted him, Marash, to know how to do these wonderful things—to read and to write—and that was why he was going to send him to school, because there at the school someone could tell you how.

The men were silent, thinking. Marash crept around nearer to his father. His father's arm went around his shoulders but his father was looking into the fire, not at Marash.

Marash heard his name. His mother had spread a blanket in his corner for him. Well, he was sleepy; and the men would sing now and he could lie over there and think of all these new things. He unwound his girdle and took off his hat. He smoothed the rumpled scalp lock that crowned his shaven head. Yawning, he curled himself up in the corner.

The men had begun to sing. The dark man sang first, his hands to his ears, and after each line he

would pause and the other man would repeat the chant in the high shrieking nasal tone the men always used in singing:

“A hundred houses mourned the chief,
A hundred houses left without a leader.”

Marash heard. The story was a long one. The voices rose and fell. They filled the house. The spell of them crept over Marash and lulled him. Together the men sang the last line and were silent.

“Glory be to your mouth!” It was Palok’s voice and the men acknowledged his thanks.

They sang again, and yet again. The night wore on. Marash slept to wake fitfully and watch the faint flicker of the little torch of pitch pine that lay in a bit of wire netting his father had hung from a rafter.

“School!” thought Marash; and he would find out how to read and to write and—he shuddered delightedly—when he was big, a man, he would, yes, he, Marash, would *know more than his father*. There seemed something almost wrong in a thought like that; but had not his father wanted it, that very thing? So it was not really wicked, after all, but good, a sort of miracle.

Yes, he would know more than his father! He also

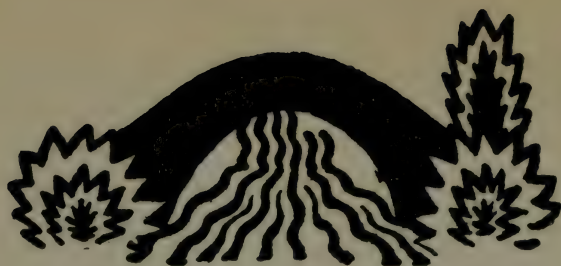
would be a friend of the "Bairaktor." People would come to him for advice and for counsel—to *him*, Marash, Son-of-Palok—the man who could sing from a book and make marks that spoke on paper.

So many things the books would tell him, about everything, about all the world. He wondered, sleepily, about the world. There were other valleys he knew, besides the one in which he lived. And there must be people in them, children like him, boys who kept goats. He had gone once over the northern mountain pass, "neck" he called it, and had seen other villages from the high land. That was the way the world was—necks to cross and valleys beyond, and always more necks and more valleys until you came to the edge. Marash puzzled.

When he could read he would find out these things—things his father could not tell him. He would find out about the valleys of all the world, he. Marash, Son-of-Palok.

The pine torch was out. The fire was so low that Marash knew only by the sound of breathing where his father and his friends were sleeping stretched on the floor, their feet to the warm ashes.

"Valleys of all the world!" whispered Marash just before sleep caught him.



CHAPTER IX

THE WAY TO SCHOOL

IS BORA ready?" a white-capped head peeked in through the half-open door.

Bor, sitting by the fire eating cornbread very fast indeed, sprang to her feet.

"Yes, yes, Marash. I'm just eating a bite." She stuffed the remaining bit of bread into her blouse.

"You must have a clean face, Bor, and your hands must be washed off. At school the teacher says we must be clean."

"I'll stop at the spring and wash, Marash," she answered. "May I go now, Mother?"

"Your knitting, Bor. There will be time for her to knit at school?" Bor's mother, Dani, looked questioningly at Marash.

"Yes, she can knit," said Marash.

Bor picked up sock and needles and her ball. These, too, were tucked inside her outer woolen waist.

"Good-bye, Mother. Good-bye, Father. Good-bye, Grandmother." Bor leaned to kiss the baby Skander toddling up to her. "Skander wants to go, too," she laughed. Her brown eyes shone. This was a great day. To walk an hour or more on the trail, just she and Marash. Then to see this strange new thing Marash had told about, a school.

They started off. "Never mind cheese," said Marash, "I have cheese enough for two."

Their bare feet pattered down the hill together. At the spring Bor stopped and dipped her hands in the water flowing down the rock. She rubbed hard, picking up a little sand to scour them with. When they were very clean she lifted water to her face with them and scrubbed that carefully.

"Ears, too," said Marash. "Clean ears and neck go best with a clean face."

Bor did her best, turning about so Marash could examine her. "That's fine," he said. They took the trail again.

Bor skipped a little.

"Tell me, Marash," she said, "when I come back to-night will I know how to read out of your book?"

"No, not to-night," said Marash. "The first day I went I thought that way, too; but reading from a book takes lots of time to learn. It's two months

now that I've been going and I can just read twenty-five pages."

"And can you write now on white paper?" questioned Bor.

"That's harder yet to learn," said Marash. "There is a little stick, long, thin, and hollow—a sort of reed it must be—cut down to a point at one end; and the teacher made some blackish water—ink, he calls it. You take the pointed stick and dip it in that and then you draw out letters and designs with that wet point that leaves a black line after it."

"I'd *love* to do that writing," Bor exclaimed, and drew her breath in with pleasure at the thought.

"Well, there is not much ink and very little paper, and the teacher has only three pens to write with. He calls the sticks pens and he brings them all the way from Skodra. Reeds like that don't grow around here anywhere. But yesterday he said we could go out and find flat bits of rock that lie on the slaty hillside close to us and use these for writing on. To-day we'll get them and he'll show us how to make a sort of writing stone and mark on it with other bits of stone, pointed the way the writing sticks are pointed, and make marks that way."

"I'll make a writing stone myself," said Bor.

"Perhaps you can," said Marash.

He raised his eyes and looked where the sun rose higher in the east.

"The sun shows it is late," he said to Bor. "We'd better hurry. The Friar doesn't like our being late. Sometimes when you're too late there is no room."

Bor looked at him with anxious, puzzled eyes. "No room?"

"No, there are many, many children," Marash answered, "and not just children, either—big boys and girls—and two old men are there. Everyone wants to go to school and learn. The early ones find room to sit down on the benches and they can get nearer where the Friar stands and so they hear the best. Then they get best chance at the writing paper and the pens. And there are books like mine, but only some, not many."

"Let's hurry, Marash." Bor's voice was anxious now.

Up the steep rocky trail they pushed. Their little mountain toes dug in to get a good hold on the ground. Their breath came faster.

"We will have to rest up here," said Marash, panting. "There is a steeper climb beyond this hill."

"I see the cross up there," said Bor, and pointed.

"Yes," answered Marash, "that's the resting place. I always cross myself. The Friar says people

should cross themselves at crosses. God helps them then."

"I know about that, too," said Bor, "St. Mark's Day, when I took my cross to church at Iballje, everybody prayed, knelt down, and made that crossing motion with one hand."

The children reached the high carved wooden cross. Each made the cross sign, then sat on the grass near by.

They rested, nibbled at their bread, and looked out over Shala valley. Peaks and peaks of mountains lay around them. Far away the roaring of the valley river sounded.

"To-day," said Marash, "Friar Gjiergji said there would be special reward for everyone at school. 'Baksheesh,' he said."

"What's that?" asked Bor, interested in the strange word.

"Oh, that's a Turkish word that people use to mean a gift or present, something nice to keep, your very own," replied Marash.

"Oh, good," cried Bor. "I chose a lucky day to go to school on, didn't I, Marash?"

"Come, let's get going or it won't turn out so lucky after all," and Marash got up, pulling at Bor with one hand.



THEY SAT ON THE GRASS NEAR THE CROSS



They started off again.

The path led down a little and then up again, this time so steeply that no word was said between them. All their breath they needed for the climb.

They rested by another cross. Marash tossed pebbles down the little foot-path they had just come up.

"After this," he said, "it's all down hill, Bor. You and I can run along the trail perhaps and so go faster."

"All right," Bor agreed.

"But farther on, a little way from here," Marash told her, "one hillside is a mass of slipping stones, small flat ones, thin like chips. They won't hurt your feet at all but they are very slippy and you'll find it hard keeping your balance."

"I know the kind of stones you mean," said Bor. She nodded knowingly.

"It's something like the slate we'll make our writing stones from, probably," said Marash.

"Yes, yes," Bor's face lightened as she spoke; "they're very smooth, those stones."

They reached the hill all covered with loose slaty bits of rock.

Marash knelt down. "See, Bor," he handed her a flat smooth piece, big as the palm of one hand.

"See how smooth that is? That's why it's good for writing on."

"But it's so brittle. See, it breaks in two if I just squeeze it." Bor took hold and pressing a little bit she cracked the piece in half.

Marash shook his head. "This kind of rock is not half thick enough nor strong enough. It isn't really slate rock but it's something like it. For writing we must find the pieces thick and smooth and flat, on both sides, too. We'll have to hunt for them. The Friar said he'd show us where there was a hill made of that sort of stone."

Bor and Marash walked on. The tiny stones slipped underneath their feet and slithered on each other.

"I'm sliding," laughed Bor, leaning over balancing as she slipped in spite of trying not to.

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Marash, "I can't stop myself from sitting down," and down he sat, half falling as the stony slope slid underneath his feet.

"That's fun," cried Bor, and down she sat, too, letting her feet slide with the slipping stones and squatting there, pushing herself along with both her hands.

Then Marash toppled over and rolled, trying to stop himself, down the hill.

Bor laughed to see him going down so fast, clutching at all the tiny sliding stones, laughing himself.

She struggled up and ran on down, faster than she had thought to go because for every step she took she slid two more.

At length, quite breathless, giggling both of them, they met each other at the foot of the hill.

Marash stood up and brushed the dirt off his white trousers, smiling back at Bor who dusted off her woolen blouse. Then he frowned a little.

"Mountaineers like us, Bor, ought to go down trails on two feet, not rolling so like puppies," said he, looking back where they had come down.

Bor looked more serious.

"Well," she said slowly, "we can practice keeping on our feet next time. If such a hill was steeper or if a path like that led to a cliff's edge it's true we might get into trouble then, and fall and hurt ourselves."

"And more than that, Bor," Marash warned, "everyone would say we were 'Skodran,' people from Skodra, used to city streets, not mountaineers at all with feet that know how to keep mountain trails."

They walked on gravely.

Now the path was good, firm earth beneath their feet. They trotted, Marash ahead.

He stopped on the crest of another hill. "Look, Bor." He drew her close to where he stood. He pointed.

"See down in the valley there—see all those houses and right up above them a big house of stones fitted more smoothly to the wall? Look sharp, you'll see a cross fixed on the roof."

"Yes, yes." Bor saw it all.

"That big house is the church," Marash explained, still pointing. "And right next, in the same fenced-in yard, you see the Friar's house where we have school. See that? It's higher than the other houses. Stairs lead you up like those in Father's house."

"I see the place," said Bor; "let's hurry now and get there."

They did not talk now, only hurried on, down one hill and then another hill.

Every now and then Bor raised her eyes to take a long look at the Friar's house. How far it was! And as they went along they seemed to get no nearer it at all. No matter how fast her two feet carried her the house stayed in the selfsame place. She hurried more, and Marash, still ahead, heard her quick feet and hurried, too.

"We're getting there," he told her, reassuring. "A quarter hour now will see us in the yard. From

where we are the village looks much nearer than it really is. The first day I came here I thought I'd take one big jump off that hill I pointed from and land with both my feet right in the churchyard."

Bor gave a little laugh. "You didn't do it, though, Marash."

"No—no, I didn't." Marash smiled a bit. "I just kept going fast the way we're going now."

At last they reached the rise of ground that led up to the church. Bor heard a ringing in the air. "What's that, Marash?"

"That's the priest's bell for school. He sends old Marku to the balcony to pull the rope that makes the bell ring. See where the bell is hung?"

Bor saw it swinging on the church roof.

"Yes, I see, it hangs inside a sort of little house stuck on the roof. Why does he ring now?"

"It's calling us and all the school people to hurry and come. It's time for school. Come on." Marash grabbed her hand.



CHAPTER X

MARASH AND BOR AT SCHOOL

UP THE low slope they ran and went in by the swinging wooden gate to the big yard around the church and school.

They saw the Friar standing by the door.

Bor looked at him.

He was a thin man with a long moustache and he wore a long brown robe tied with a rope about his waist, and hanging from his belt Bor saw a chain of beads and at its end a little silver cross. She looked down at his feet. Bare they were like her own, but a thick piece of leather bound his toes and she could see a heavy wooden sole under each foot. "Sandals," thought Bor. She looked up in his face. It was young and kind. His brown eyes seemed to smile at her. Bor thought, "He has good eyes with softness in them." She smiled at the Friar.

Marash spoke to him, "Friar Gjergji," he said, "this girl is Bor, Daughter-of-Gjok of Gimaj. She wants to learn at your school."

The Friar took her hand. "Greeting to you, Bor, Gjok's daughter, a long life! How have you made the trail, my child?"

Bor pressed her forehead to his hand. "Long life to you, Friar Gjergji," she said, and then answering his question about her journey she said as she had heard her mother say so many times to just such asking, "Slowly, slowly; little by little."

"So you want to learn things?" said Friar Gjergji.

"Yes," said Bor, "if God is willing and you will teach me."

"God blesses a courageous heart and loves more wisdom than knowing nothing. My heart is glad and welcomes you to school."

He led the way in and the children followed.

They went into a small room crowded with mountain people young and old though most were children like Bor and Marash. Bor noticed several little girls as old as she was herself. Then there were other ones much smaller, and older boys and older girls, too; and she saw two men, their rifles on their backs, and one old man with grizzled hair was there.

The Friar pressed his way to a small table and stood behind it.

First he greeted them, then made a prayer, and set a wooden box out on the table. Bor wondered. Marash whispered in her ear: "He promised us back-sheesh to-day. Now he will give it."

The Friar spoke: "You mountaineers know how to keep your rifles clean; now that you go to school you must learn to keep yourselves clean, too. This box is full of little cakes of soap and everyone of you may have a half a piece."

Bor and Marash looked at each other, their faces lit with pleasure. Never in their lives had they had any soap at home. Once Bor had seen some pale pink squares in Skodra Bazaar and Dani, her mother, had explained that these were soap cakes for the city people. Mountaineers, Bor knew, could never pay for such expensive things as soap. They rinsed their hands before each meal in water only and after a long day's walk they often washed their tired feet in water heated by the fire. When they washed their clothes they boiled wood ashes and made cleaning water so. No, Bor had never used a cake of soap. To have a piece would be a sort of treat. She'd save a bit of it till Easter time when everyone at home

would give themselves a thorough scrubbing before they put on their new Easter clothes.

She and Marash pressed forward with the rest to reach the table. Friar Gjergji cut the cakes in half most carefully and gave a piece to every reaching hand. Bor clasped the precious thing and with Marash wormed through the crowd into a corner to examine this strange treasure. "Sapun," they called it. Smooth and slippery it felt. Bor put hers to her nose and smelt. She even touched it with her tongue to see what such a funny smell would taste like. "Ugh!" she said suddenly, "don't lick it, Marash." And she rubbed her hand across her mouth to wipe the taste off. Marash tucked the yellow square of soap inside his girdle.

The Friar passed through the crowd and the rest pushed after him, Marash and Bor with them.

Marash said in Bor's ear, "We are going to the learning room. You will sit on one side with the girls and all the boys and men will sit on the other side of the room. Go with the other girls and squeeze yourself onto one of the long benches with the rest. We don't sit on the floor in mountain style when we're in school."

"Benches?" said Bor. She knew what benches were

but the word was just a little strange to her. The only chairs she had seen were three-legged stools the day that she had visited Marash with Dani and the Baby Skander last year. These would be different, long, Marash had said.

The schoolroom that they entered now was larger than the other room and filled with long wooden seats; and narrow tables just as long as these were fastened right in front of every seat. Bor wriggled in between the bench and table as she saw the others do and slid herself along, bumping her chin on the table edge.

Soon everyone was sitting in straight rows before Friar Gjergji. Bor could hear voices all around her, soft whispering. The Friar said, "Enough chattering now; scholars need ears, not tongues." And then the room was still.

Bor craned her neck to see where Marash sat. He smiled at her and then looked at the Friar. Bor looked that way, too, so did everyone. School had begun.

The Friar talked then to Zoti-Madhe as he called God and sang songs like the ones Bor had heard in church on St. Mark's Day with her mother. The children sang after him. Bor sang, too, as soon as she caught what the words were.

Then the Friar took out of his robe a long white

pencil—Bor thought it looked like a little white stick, very smooth. "He is going to show us writing," said the little girl who sat next to Bor. There was a black cloth, hard-looking and shiny, pinned on the wall behind the Friar and he made white marks on it with his little white stick. "Designs," said Bor to herself. "I will learn how to draw them, too."

Friar Gjiergi made sounds for every design he drew. When he said them fast Bor heard a word she knew—"Maltsor"—that was the word for "mountaineer." That was what she was, and Marash and all the people there—and the Friar? No, he was not Maltsor. He came from Skodra, maybe. She had seen once in Skodra three or four men in long brown robes like his; she remembered now.

"M-alt-sor"—everyone said the word slowly. Bor said it, too.

The Friar drew other pictures on the board and said new words. Every picture seemed to have a sound of its own. How queer that was.

Bor felt a little sleepy. Her eyes stopped peering over the kerchiefed head of the little girl in front of her and fell to studying the wooden table before her. She felt it. Someone had smoothed it very smooth.

Suddenly everyone began saying things all together in loud voices. What were they saying? Oh, numbers,

she understood—"eight, nine, ten." Bor went on with the rest up to forty; after that she didn't know. She listened. They went on counting up to one hundred. "Chin!" Bor heard. That was one hundred. Bor said it, too. She'd heard it often.

Then they all started moving at once. Out they went, pushing and whispering to each other. Bor went, too, found Marash. "What are we going to do now?" she asked.

"Some of the big boys are going to get the writing rocks to make slates of," said Marash.

"I'll go, too," said Bor.

"We'll tell Friar Gjiergji," said Marash. "He is going to stay and play with the children in the churchyard."

They went to where the Friar stood in a big circle with the others.

"May we go after writing stones?" asked Marash.

"If you like," answered Friar Gjiergji, and off ran Bor and Marash after the big boys.

They went across the hills down into the valley, then up on one side where rocks juttied out and flat slabs stood up and lay scattered around.

Bor and Marash watched the big boys. They hunted and pulled at some of the smaller slabs to loosen them from bigger pieces of the slaty stone.

"See," said one, Zef they called him, "here is a fine slate," and he held in two hands a thick flat piece of rock. Bor ran to see and Marash drew his finger over the smooth surface. "You mark it this way," said Zef, and taking a scrap of the same rock he made designs on his stone, pictures, curly lines, like the ones the Friar had made in the schoolroom. Bor looked hard—yes, it was the same shape of drawing exactly that Friar Gjergji had first put on his blackboard, the sign for "mountaineer." She read the word aloud, "Maltso."

Zef and Marash looked at her. "She can read," said Zef, his voice full of surprise. Bor looked up, puzzled, threw back her head for "no," clicking her tongue.

Marash thrust his face close to hers. "Yes, you can, Bor, that's what they call 'reading'—knowing the different sounds of all those pictures, and what they mean."

"Oh," said Bor, still puzzled.

Zef wrote another word and held the slate for her to see. "No, no," said Bor, "that's something I don't know."

"She reads a little," said the big boy. Bor's face cleared. Oh, now she understood what they all meant. The signs and designs always had a word and mean-

ing to them, and she would have to learn them one by one, all of them, before she could really *read*. How long it would take! She'd have to come every day and never miss a lesson; otherwise she'd be old and gray haired like Grandmother before ever she could finish learning all the words in all the world.

They all hunted now for good slate stones. Marash and Bor looked hard with eyes and fingers. It wasn't easy. Some stones would break in two while you were prying them off the rock they seemed to be a piece of. Some would crack when you were knocking at them to get them loose. Others were so rough that when you drew the little writing stone across them it bumped and joggled so you couldn't make the mark you wanted to at all.

At last between them all they had a good half-dozen stones, flat and smooth on both their sides and big enough. They started back, carrying their slates carefully.

Halfway they stopped at Zef's house. He lived quite near the school. And he went in and with some strips of wood he framed his slate in a rough wooden frame, tying the wood together at the corners with thin strings of rawhide. "Now I can hold it better for marking on it and it will lie flat on the table," he explained.

"The edges of the stone won't scratch and stick you, either," said another boy, admiring Zef's work.

"I'll fix mine that way, too," Marash said afterward to Bor.

When they got back the Friar and all the rest were in the green churchyard playing "Cat and Mouse" in a big ring.

Laying their slates down carefully on a rock the boys and Bor joined in the circle.

"I've never played this game," said Bor to Marash.

"It's fun," said Marash, "listen."

Bor had never seen so many children all together. She looked around the ring. Such lots of them! And different sorts of braiding on their suits and different socks from those she knitted at home. These children were not all children of her village she knew by just this difference in their clothing. Some came from far away, some even from Merturi, another tribe. And yet they all spoke just as she spoke, used the same words, with just a little difference in the sound sometimes. "They're all Shqyptar, like me," Bor told herself, "the Mountain Eagle's children, mountaineers."

A boy and girl were in the middle of the ring. "He is the cat and she's the mouse," said Marash in Bor's ear. "Hear what they're saying."

"Mouse, mouse, what are you doing there?" said the boy in the ring.

"I am nibbling, nibbling at bread and cheese," answered the girl who stood with her back turned to him a few steps off.

"Mouse, mouse, will you give me some?" asked the boy.

"No, no, my friend, there is only enough for me," said the mouse.

"Then I shall take some for myself," said the cat.

"Oh, no, you won't, for I shall run away." the mouse answered back.

"Then I will chase you; shall we try a race?" Now the cat and the mouse set themselves all ready to run, leaning forward, feet apart.

"Come, then!" called the mouse, and off she ran, the cat after her hot-foot on her track.

Bor saw them rushing by, the mouse ahead, ducking under the hands that made the ring, in and out. And always behind her sped the cat, taking the same openings, following fast on her heels. Closer, closer came the cat, and faster, faster ran the mouse. Bor laughed and danced up and down just watching them. Oh, the mouse was caught, the cat had got her. And now another boy and girl took places for cat and mouse and the game began again.

This time the cat did not follow close and once chose an opening in the ring that the mouse had not run through. Suddenly all the children shrieked. Bor heard the words, "The cat has missed, the cat has missed," and the race stopped; the mouse had won this time.

Then Friar Gjiergji said, "The hours go fast, we must stop our play. Those who have writing books or any piece of slate can come inside with me and I will help them write."

Bor took her slate and followed into the house. So did Marash and several of the rest. They all sat down at the schoolroom tables.

Some of the bigger girls and boys had books to write in. Bor went to see and peered in every one. The white paper seemed all covered up with funny little tracings, tiny lines, all very thin and black. She watched. Each had a long thin reed, pointed as Marash said, and in a dish of blackish water the Friar brought around each dipped the point. It dropped black drops, and, as the child who held it touched the white paper with it, it left behind it a thin line of black. "I'm making words," said the big girl Bor watched.

Bor took her own rough piece of slate and the little chip of stone for writing on it. She made big lines

and marks and tried to think how "Maltsor" had looked. She couldn't quite remember.

"Show me how it goes—the picture that means 'mountaineer,'" she begged of the girl writing near her.

Leaning over, the big girl—Gjyl her name was—drew with Bor's sharp writing stone the word "Maltsor." It stood out plainly on Bor's slate. "Thank you," said Bor, then tried twenty times to make a drawing like it. Always her hand shook, changed the way she wanted it to go. Bor labored, stuck her tongue out just a bit, and when the pencil went too much the wrong way she scrubbed out all the marks with the kerchief end that hung down from her shoulder.

It wouldn't go at all, that "Maltsor." Bor sat back, tired with the trying.

The Friar came and looked at what she'd done, patted her shoulder. "Slowly, slowly," said he, "little by little."

Bor smiled up at him. Those were the words you used for mountain trails. Well, this was slower still than any trail, and harder. She could climb a dozen hills in half the time it took her to learn how to draw one of these writing signs. She sighed. How long it took to learn to read and write!

She slipped her knitting from her blouse and sat and knitted, happily. Anyway, she could knit. That wasn't hard for her—not now. Though she remembered long ago when she first learned how slowly it had gone, how long her first sock took before she reached the top of it and put the last stitch in. She knitted faster now—as fast as Dani perhaps. “Some day,” thought Bor, “I’ll read and write fast, too. It’s only at the start that things are slow,” she comforted herself.

Marash came up. “It’s hard, this writing is,” and showed to Bor what he had done on his slate. Bor made out much better lines than hers. “That’s good, Marash.” She praised him.

“We must go now,” Marash said; “the sun is high and everybody goes back to their homes to do the shepherding and other work. Likely your mother’s looking for you now. I have to take our goats to-day much farther up the valley where the grass is fresher. Hurry, say good-bye to everyone. There is the Friar, Bor.”

Bor ran to Friar Gjiergji and took his hand, bending her head to touch it as before. “Thank you, Friar Gjiergji, I want to come again to school,” said Bor.

“Come every day, Bor,” the Friar answered her,

"each day there'll be a little more to learn and we will play more games, just like to-day. Good-bye, Bor, good-bye, Marash, may your feet go on the smoothest trails," and he gave blessings to them both as they ran off.

The way home seemed very short to Bor. They walked more steadily, talked some, but did not play. Bor wanted very much to get back home and tell her mother Dani everything, and show her slate and make those lines on it, and she'd tell about the other children, and those two men and that old grandfather all coming there to learn, and all about the Friar, and at last she'd take her soap out and show Dani how you washed with it. She scampered up the last slope to the house, waving her hand to Marash down below.

"Good-bye, Marash, good luck, may you have easy traveling from here!"

And he called back, "Good luck to you, Bor. Peace to all your house! Good-bye!" Then Bor went in.



CHAPTER XI

MARASH MAKES A PLAN

MARASH thrust his hot face into the icy water of the tiny mountain stream. What a day it had been! The sky clear blue and never a cloud. All the days were like this now, from sunrise to sunset, for summer had really come. Marash, leaving his face wet, lifted it to the breeze. He was cooler now. He did not feel the scorching sun so much.

"It is time to get a real swim in Kiri water," he told himself as he walked toward home. It was well into June now and before a month was gone the rivers of Skodra plain below his mountains would be shrinking, shrinking until they would be just threads of water in the wide empty river beds. All the little

mountain brooks that fed the big rivers would trickle, trickle over the rocks, growing smaller and smaller till there was nothing left of them at all. And then where Kiri River ran to-day there would be only puddles here and there, and soon, by the middle of July perhaps, even the puddles would be gone and where the river had been would be only caked mud, dry, dry as any bone, baked into cracks and flaky bits of clay under the broiling sun. Marash knew so well how summer dried things up.

He went in the door of his stone house. "Yes," he said to himself, "I must go swimming soon or there will be nothing to swim in." He climbed the stone stairs and entered the dim room.

"Father, if you go to Skodra this week I want to go along as far as Ura Mezit."

His father, Palok, was sitting on the floor cross-legged cleaning his rifle, rubbing, rubbing, rubbing the rusty places with oil from the tiny brass box he wore fastened to his belt, rubbing a long time, slowly, steadily, until the bright steel shone clear and clean. He did not answer Marash, just sat polishing. Marash waited. His father was very busy. In a few minutes he would get time to answer. Marash drew near, squatting to see better how the polishing went, waiting.

Palok stopped rubbing, looked satisfied at one bright spot, laid the gun across his knee, and looked at his son. His eyes were smiling eyes.

"So, you want to go to Mezi Bridge—you want to see if it still spans the Kiri, is that it? Or do you want to count the stones that make the middle arch? Or," his lips parted in a big smile, "is Prentash going to meet you there and play at hide-and-seek with you in and out of the arches at the sides? What is in your little shaven head, wise man?"

Marash laughed and leaning suddenly forward put both hands on his father's knee.

"It's none of those things though I do hope the Kiri is still running. I want to swim."

"And jump off the big rock?"

Marash shook his head, his smile broader than ever. He hugged one of his brown bare feet. "No, no, not yet. The rock is too high for me."

"Too high for a boy who can herd goats, and sharpen his own knife, and make as good a cup of coffee as I myself? Come, come."

"The rock is three times as tall as I am," said Marash.

"True," said his father, "but the water is six times as deep. You won't strike bottom there with any jump."

Marash thought a long time, his fingers running up and down the black braid on one of his tight white woolen trouser legs. His fingers followed it from the hip down to his ankle, back and forth, and he was still thinking.

"Anyway, Father, may I go along with you and Uncle when you go to the bazaar this week? I'll swim in the Kiri and wait for you by Ura Mezit."

"Good, you can drive the donkey back and your uncle and I will be free of the little beast and can talk in peace."

Marash jumped up and ran outside to tell his mother the good news. He saw her coming up from the spring, the wooden water keg strapped to her back. Full it was, and Marash could hear the water going slosh-slosh, klug-klug inside of it.

"Father is going to let me go with him as far as the Kiri to swim in the river when he and Uncle go to Skodra this week."

"There will be water enough for little frogs like you, no doubt," said his mother. "What day does your father go?"

"I'll ask him," said Marash, and scampered into the house.

His mother followed, setting down the heavy keg at the foot of the stairs.

The time was set for the day after to-morrow, and next day Marash walked along the rocky path to his uncle's house farther up the valley to let him know the plan.

His mother was busy all day long knitting bright colored shputa, a woolen slipper to wear under the stiff rawhide moccasins. "But you have a pair, Mother," said Marash, "why do you knit so fast on these?"

"Palok is taking them to Skodra. Your aunt is going with scarves and towels to sell and will sell these, too, for me. Wind me more wool, Marash."

Marash sat down on the floor beside his mother and spread his two legs before him, drawn up a bit with the feet stuck up straight. The long folded strands of worsted he slipped over his toes, slanting his feet out to keep the threads from slipping. Then fast went his two hands winding, winding, into a fine white ball the long folds of thread. The ball grew and grew and the worsted slipped strand by strand off his feet. He moved his toes, bending them towards him a little to help the thread slip off and never catch. His mother knitted on the floor beside him, one foot pushing now and then against the baby's cradle. His father sat a little distance from the fire filling old cartridge cases with bullets and gunpowder,

and slipping each new-filled one into his long belt made with pockets just to hold them in a long, long line about his waist. Marash knew he got ready for the trip to-morrow.

Marash wound fast, hardly watching his own feet or hands. He'd wound so many balls for his mother he didn't need to watch them any more, his fingers knew. Instead he thought, looking sometimes at his mother knitting there; at his father so busy with the little metal cylinders; at the fire burning slowly, lighting where they sat and leaving a dim darkness in the house corners behind them.

He was going to-morrow. He'd wear his "opanga," so his feet would not be bothered with the sharp rocks, besides they were nice moccasins, these opanga made of goatskin and shaggy with long brown goats' hair on the outside, and fastened with a real buckle and strap his father had bought in Skodra last month. He would wear them, anyway, and his slippers of purple wool inside—his shputa. He wouldn't need socks, these would be enough. And then he'd be sure to wear the loose white things he used for underclothes sometimes and sometimes on hot days for outside clothing, baggy white trousers and a loose white waist, and the long wrapped sash. He liked the sash and wound it deftly around and around his

waist, reaching from nearly underneath his arms to just below his waist. Colored it was, red, yellow, green, quite gay and beautiful. Marash knew how to wind it as men did and using neither knot nor fastening so fix it that it set tight and snug, hugging him, yet bending comfortably when he bent. And what a famous lot of pockets could be found in it, each roll of it gave room for carrying something. Marash counted over what he would take to-morrow tucked safely in his belt folds. His knife for one thing and of course some midday bread. Perhaps his mother would see he had a piece of rank goat's cheese. Marash, winding wool, wrinkled his short nose at the thought of cheese, how strong it smelled, how good, delicious. Then besides his knife and bread and cheese he'd take a sort of handkerchief to fasten hanging from his white wool skullcap over the back of his neck if the sun got warm. "And if I want I can put stones or nuts in it to carry home," he said softly to himself. Once he had found a curved piece of metal on the trail dropped out of someone's gun or watch or pistol. Marash did not know what it was but he had kept it carefully. He'd take that, too, to-morrow.

He puzzled a moment. Where had he left that kerchief of his? Oh, yes, he remembered now. He had

tucked it in a crevice of the house wall where there was enough space between two stones in the corner where he spread his blanket every night. So that was safe enough. Such kerchiefs were important. He never went far without one. He could use it for so many things. It often served him for a string or rope to tie things with, and sometimes for a bag or even for wrapping things. He wore it round his neck or round his head or used it for a towel and wiped wet hands or face with it. Sometimes he needed it for playing games, to make a flag when he and other boys played "Bairaktor," the "standard bearer." Or when they played a game called "hare and hunter" and the cloth was used to tie on two folded caps, one on each side of a boy's head like rabbit ears. Yes, a cloth or two would never come amiss no matter where he was.

What else to take? His whip. He'd better take along his whip and use it when he drove the donkey back. Uncle Kol had given him that whip the day a long time back when he had first been big enough to walk the whole way to Skodra and to help drive the tiny donkey loaded down with grass to sell for fodder. He remembered that. Uncle Kol had brought the whip from Tirana across the Mati River south. It had just suited Marash. It was perhaps as long as

his stretched arm and made of braided strips of leather dyed red and black. It was not stiff at all but would bend and twist easily. He liked to think of that first day he'd used it. How little he had been then! Why, now Palok let him drive the donkey all by himself. He even let him help to tie on the load. Donkeys could carry loads bigger than themselves. And tying on a load like that was hard. You had to twist and wind the rope and make very sure the weight was balanced perfectly for if it wasn't when the donkey trotted the load would sag and slip and in no time at all it would be loose and dragging. Well, he'd take his whip then. It was hanging on the wall; he knew the place, just next to where his father hung his rifle.

Marash sighed happily, laying the big white ball of yarn down on the floor near where his mother sat.

He would watch his father now. "Help here, Marash. Tuck each of these new cartridges in one of these small pockets of the belt, so. See?" and Palok fitted in a cartridge so that right end up it sat snug in its own little case. Then he went on loading the still empty cases while Marash worked at filling up the belt. He loved to help his father—to do things men did, things he'd do when he would be a man. Some day he'd have a rifle, too, and carry it across

his shoulder as he went along the trails just as his father did. And he would shave his face with a sharp knife and leave a fine, fierce-looking moustache like his father's own, a manly one so people seeing him would know he was a man and strong and brave and honorable.

Marash put in another cartridge carefully right side up and tucked it tight inside the pocket. As he worked he made believe he was a man at last, and this, his belt filled with his cartridges for him to use in his own rifle. Sometimes on the trail he'd have to shoot, meeting a man whose tribe was enemy to his. Or just to greet a friend seen far off on another mountainside he'd fire in the air to let him know Marash, Son-of-Palok, passed and wished him good luck and a safe journey. A rifle could speak louder than any voice calling. Such a shot would ring against the rocks and go on ringing against other rocks in echoes sounding clear down the valley—often he'd heard it—loved the shock and sound of it striking his ears. He dreamed, "When I'm a man——"

At last the belt was full and Palok put his things away, hanging the strip of cartridges near to his rifle on the wall by the door.

Marash heard his mother beating up bread of yel-

low cornmeal in one dim corner. "Evening bread," he called it to himself. The sun was low outside. He went out, going down the steep path to where the spring splashed in a stream on rocks. He sat down on a rock above it, watching how the water fell in three streams where the rock hollowed. He put his hand in. Cool—cold—cold with the snow melting far up on the high neck of the mountain wall that hemmed his valley in. Kiri water wouldn't be so cold and in the hot daytime he'd love the coolness. Would the river be as Palok said: six times as deep as he was tall? Well, he knew how to swim. Two years ago he'd learned to trust himself in water where he could not reach the bottom with his toes. He could swim now quite easily. At first he'd paddled, splashed just like a puppy floundering, but now he swam. Oh, not as well as Nush, his big grown cousin, but he could swim across the Kiri, and from the deep part of the stream below the big rock last summer he had swum clear to the blue pool underneath the bridge, the pool that Cousin Nush said had no bottom. No bottom, mused Marash, what was there, then? He sat still, wondering.

The sun sank all at once back of the mountain wall and Marash shivered. Loosening his belt, he spread it, wrapped it warmer, higher up about him.

He would go now. It was surely time for evening bread.

He ran fast back up the path, climbing slopes easily. His knees liked bending for the clambering. He'd heard his father say that mountain men could not stand level walking, that their legs had to have hills for comfort. So did his, his legs were mountain legs. They liked to eat up hills and slopes like this. And Marash climbed, taking deep breaths, humming to himself. Often men sang on trails even when going up. He'd heard them. So he hummed now as he went.

Upstairs the little house was very dark. The tiny window, just a square hole in the house wall, had a little wooden shutter like a door. It had been closed against the cold night air and so no daylight could come through. As Marash entered he could not see anything at first except the fire burning very low. Then his eyes made things out. He heard his sister Pren in one far corner gathering up some wood to make the fire brighter for a light. He saw his father smoking by the hearth. And by the farther wall his mother bent over the baby's cradle putting to sleep his tiny sister Lul.

Bread had been baked. Fresh yellow cornbread steamed on the low round table near the fire, lower

this table was than Marash's knees when he stood by it. In the middle of it was a bowl filled with boiled meat—white cubes of fat pork cool enough to pick up with the fingers. Marash loved the taste. Often he was glad he was not Mussulman like all the boys in Drishti by the Kiri. They couldn't eat pork, were afraid of it. They wouldn't even look at any pig because pig's meat was pork. But he, Marash, was Christian and so was everybody where he lived, and they kept pigs to eat. Funny, thin-bodied, shaggy things they were with bluish eyes and rooting, snorting noses—snouts that dug. So everyone ate pork here and this white greasy fat Marash liked hugely.

Palok had already eaten. Now his mother and his sister Pren would squat at the low table. Marash sat down cross-legged close to them and took the piece of cornbread handed him by his mother. "Buk kalamuchit," that was the name he called it. On the table he could see a little pile of salt in crystals, just like tiny pebbles. He took some up and held it in the palm of one hand, biting his bread and dipping the moist end of it in the coarse salt. Then a cube of pork—he helped himself from the shallow bowl holding it. This was a good supper; he ate hungrily.

His eyes blinked, and he gave a little yawn.

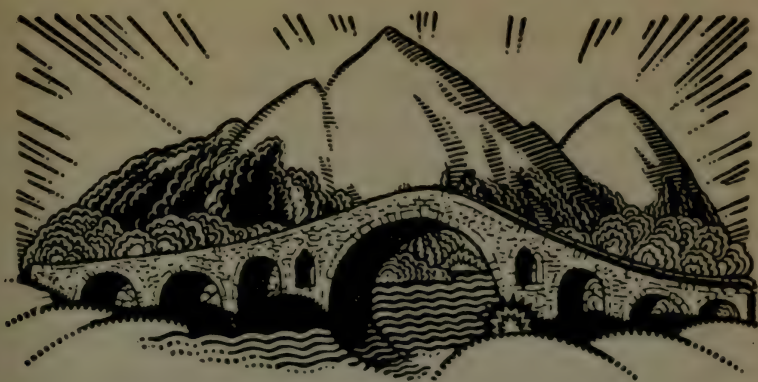
There were no guests to-night. Likely there'd be no singing, only sleep.

To-morrow—to-morrow they'd start early on the trail long before sun-up. He'd sleep hard then and wake all lively for the journey.

He finished eating. Taking the tied bunch of stiff twigs fashioned for a broom he swept crumbs off the floor into the fire. His father brewed strong coffee in the little cups and gave Marash a sip of his.

"To bed, now, Sleepyhead. To-morrow's sun will rise in seven hours. Go to sleep."

Marash left the circle at the fire, undid his long wound belt, took off his round felt cap, stretched his bare toes in comfort, laying himself down on an old goats' hair rug in one dark corner. Soon he was asleep.



CHAPTER XII

THE SWIM IN KIRI RIVER

MARASH was awake. The hens underneath were clucking and squawking. He heard his father's steps going down the stairs. He heard him slide the big bolt on the door, a heavy wooden bar it was, and then the door creaked opening and Marash could see faint daylight showing through the wide cracks in the floor. His father came back, stirred the fire ashes, piled faggots on the coals that glowed red where he blew. Against the hot embers he set coffee water in the tiny saucepan. Then he went to the little window in the wall and swung open the wooden shutter. There was no glass. Gray morning showed. Marash could feel the faintest breath of air that blew inside and found him in his corner.

He sat up, stretched, yawned. He heard his mother

up and busy somewhere. Then the baby cried for just a minute, hungry; then she quieted as she was given breakfast. Pren got things ready for the Skodra trip making up bags and bundles, Marash thought. He heard her moving.

Hanging on a wooden peg stuck in the wall near him were the white underthings he had planned to wear. He slipped off his heavier clothes and put these on. He stood wrapping his long belt around him there in the half-light. He felt under one corner of his sleeping rug and found his goatskin shoes. He slipped them on his feet and buckled them. His round white cap he set over the straggling scalp lock on top of his shaven head. Behind him in a niche of the rough stone that made the wall he fumbled with sure fingers for his knife and for that metal thing he treasured so. Yes, there they were. He slipped them in his belt and looked about then for the cloth, feeling in a hollow where he had tucked it. He tied it for a kerchief round his throat. Then he got another cloth from where his mother slept across the room. It was a bigger one. He tucked it in his belt. He made up his mind to wrap his cheese and bread in it.

Now for his whip. He knew it dangled on a wooden peg beside his father's rifle near the door, handy to

pick up when going out. He reached and twisted, standing on his toes to get the handle strap free of the peg. There, now he had it! He thrust it partly in one long fold of his girdle. Once they were walking he would carry it.

He went back to the fire. His mother poured some water from a small tin pail and Marash rinsed his hands off in the stream. The water running on the floor struck the warm earth near the fire and made a hissing sound, sending up steam. Breakfast was bread and salt. Marash ate, and after drank water from the pail. Now he was ready.

Feet sounded, voices, too. In came his Uncle Prenk and his wife Len. They sat down on the floor by the hearth, giving a morning greeting to the family. They took from Palok the tiny cups of coffee hot and sweet. "Thank you." "Good fortune." "God send a blessing on your path to-day."

They drank; then talked with Palok and Zina. Marash saw his mother give a cloth-wrapped bundle to his aunt Len. Inside he knew were the bright knitted slippers finished yesterday, shputa like his but larger. Len tucked the bundle in a bag she carried made of a square of yellow cloth with the corners tied together. In the bag were towels and scarves she'd made herself to sell in Skodra.

"Here, Marash," Zina said, "don't you forget to take your lunch along." And Marash pulled his knife out, lifted the one sharp blade out of its horn handle, and cut a good square of the breakfast bread Zina held out. His father handed him a round wet piece of cheese, gray-white and smelling strong. How fine that cheese would taste when he should take it out to eat beside the river. He carved a good chunk off with his knife and gave back the rest. Then bread and cheese he wrapped most carefully in the cloth he'd set aside for this. He tucked the package under a wide strip of his belt, pulling the cloth band tighter at the edge to hold the thing more surely. He would not like to lose his food on the trail.

Now the men slung their guns over their shoulders. Marash held his whip now in his hand, the handle strap around his wrist. He settled his round cap more firmly on his head.

"Good-bye," "Good luck," "Smooth trails," "Long life," farewells and blessings followed them as they went out, and Zina came down to the lower door and stood outside to wave them a last good-bye. "Fortune grant favor. Heaven bless your journeying this day." Marash waved his hand to her and down the mountain path they trooped—Palo ahead, then Len, then Prenk, and last Marash.

A short distance in front of Palok on the trail Marash saw the little donkey waiting, loaded down with thin sticks of wood for burning in the Skodra people's homes. His uncle sold this wood in the bazaar. And Marash knew the donkey would be loaded up again when they left Skodra, but with different things, things bought for bringing back to mountain houses. Maybe a new tin pail to cook in, maybe a new warm rug to sleep on, maybe more salt or coffee beans, or sugar even. A rope was round the donkey's neck and the loose end of it was held under a heavy stone. Prenk lifted up the stone and led the animal while Len urged him on from behind and Marash running up struck at him with his whip, calling, "Get on, old cucumber," just as he'd heard men call in the bazaar.

They all walked on as mountain people walk, swinging their arms and leaning back a bit. The path was narrow, stony. Sharp stones sometimes, but through the tough rawhide that made his shoes Marash could hardly feel them.

They walked not fast, just steadily. Len watched the donkey on the steep sides of the hill. That heavy load could pull him over sideways. Marash helped her all he could. There was one hard place, steep, narrow, full of rocks at the top of a hill where

Prenk took the donkey by the head and Len steadied the load while Marash took him by the tail and lifted with all his might. Prenk pulled and lifted, too, and together they got him safely over the spot. "We mustn't let him fall," said Prenk. "If he upsets it would be a job to get him on his feet again."

They went on. Before they climbed a hill they sat down at the foot of it to rest and sometimes at the top they rested, too. Often a wooden cross much taller than Marash marked a good resting place. The men would smoke and Len would take her knitting from her blouse and knit, while Marash tried his whip out on a rock perhaps or shook a pebble out of his opanga as he called his moccasins, or played "rabbit on a rock" setting a small stone on a larger one and throwing others at it trying to knock it off. Sometimes he did it, too. Most of the time, though, they went down not up, for Skodra and the Kiri lay much lower than the mountains where they lived. As they went down a slope Marash leaned back to balance. "On the way back," said Len, "the donkey's load will be a lighter one and you can do the driving all alone. I want to get this sock I'm knitting done and so I'll work on that and leave the little animal to you." Marash felt pleased at this.

They walked a long, long time.

After a while from the high trail Marash could see, far off, the low land where Skodra lay, the great plain reaching from the mountains' foot to the roofs and clustered gardens of the city. The broad Lake of Skodra lay beyond. Marash forgot the donkey then and pushed past Len and Palok, hurrying. He gained a low hill. Yes, down below he saw it at the plain's edge where the mountains ended—Mezi Bridge and Kiri River where he would go swimming soon, oh, very soon.

The sun was high now and the trail was hot. Marash could feel the sun scorching the back of his neck as he stood looking at the river. He took the kerchief from around his neck where it was hanging loosely and tucked all one side of it under his cap's edge at the back. Now it hung down to his shoulders, keeping off the sun just where he felt it most. He noticed Prenk had fixed his neck that way. Cooler it was a great deal when the sun burned so.

How cool the water down below would feel on his warm body when he climbed in off the rocks and splashed and swam! The trail dipped. When it rose again he saw the river plainer and the bridge—it arched high over Kiri. Built of gray stone it was and very old. His father had said once that foreign men had come thousands of years ago and made

that bridge. And that where only mountain villages now were there once had been great busy cities filled with people who bought and sold strange goods and treasures and took the road across the bridge when they went home. Now only mountaineers went over it, carrying things to sell in the bazaar; or boys drove over it their herds of goats; or shepherds led their sheep to market or to pasture on the plain.

Marash shaded his eyes with one hand, squinting, trying hard to see if Kiri River had enough water in it still for swimming. Yes, there was still plenty for a good time. It looked deep. What had his father said? "Six times as deep as he himself was tall." That was deep.

They reached the last slope stretching to the plain. Everyone's feet went just a bit faster. They wound along a stony sort of road paved with round paving stones—cobblestones all which-way—that made walking uncomfortable. The road led past some houses, "Drishti Village," said Palok. They greeted men and women passing them. "Good peace!" "Glory to your feet!" "Long life to you!"

Down they wound; on they went. Now the wide path led right to the bridge. "Ura Mezit," Marash always called it. That meant Mezi Bridge. He liked

Ura Mezit. It was big—a great high arch of stone spanning the Kiri. On each side of this big curve were little arches open to the ground of the river bank they stood on. In and out of these he'd sometimes played hide-and-seek games with other children. The bridge was floored with earth and stones so that the road itself seemed to go right on across it all in one piece. Low walls ran all along each edge of it. The stones were flat on top of these walls so you could walk along up there if you dared to do it. To Marash it seemed a little scary. From there down, 'way down, you saw the Kiri, and if your foot slipped—— So he kept the path.

"The bridge is like a hill," he said to Len. "You go uphill to the center of the arch and then you go downhill on the other side."

The donkey's hoofs scratched on the rounded stones that showed like little cobbles set on edge here and there on the bridge floor.

Prenk and Palok sat down on the low wall near the far end and lit their cigarettes. Len stopped not far away and took out her white half-knitted sock, a ball of wool, and needles. She knitted for a bit. Marash went on to where the men were seated. He leaned against his father's knee.

"I'll be right here," he said, "when you come back."

"Good," said Palok, and smiled into his upturned face.

Marash gave the donkey one last flick with his whip and then his father, Prenk, and Len said good-bye to him and he gave them his wishes of good luck. He went back to the very top of the arch and watched the three of them and the loaded donkey go walking off toward Skodra over the level plain. Smaller they looked as they went farther off, and soon they seemed like moving specks.

Then he turned and scampered down the bridge's slope on the side toward the mountains. This bank of Kiri was the rockiest and the water over here was better for swimming. Bushes grew thick back from the river's edge, and in among these Marash made his way. He found a small clearing. Here he crouched. He took his hat off, turned it upside down, and laid it like a shallow bowl on the grass. In it he put his knife and his bit of iron and the lunch package. He laid his whip beside it. He unwound his long girdle and rolled it up in careful coils. Then, slipping off his loose white blouse, he wrapped the colored belt up in it. His baggy pants he tightened at the waist and rolled the long legs of them up above his knees.

He unbuckled his skin shoes and took them off, his shputa, too.

Ready he was now. He could hear the Kiri flowing by; far away a sort of splash and rumble, and near where he was only the soft sound of passing water, running, running, past that high rock he knew so well, the rock that was three times as high as he was.

Leaving all his things safely piled he ran barefooted over the rough ground, half brambles and half stones, to where the sloping back of the big rock slanted up toward the water. Up its slant he went on hands and knees, then slowly crept out on the edge of it; lay flat down on his stomach, his chin resting on the scratchy rim. His eyes looked down the sheer stone wall, and there—it seemed far down—flowed Kiri water, blue and clear to-day. Marash remembered how it always looked after the rains—yellow muddy water it was then, you couldn't see through it at all. But now it was so clear the pool below hardly seemed to move past him. Through the glassy clearness of it he could see bottom—yellow sand and greenish yellow rocks. Oh, deep it was, that pool—deeper than it looked from where he lay. Six times as deep as he was tall, so his father had said.

"Some day I'll jump off here," he told himself,

"but not to-day. To-day the rock's too high, the pool's too deep," and smiling to himself he slid back from the stony edge, scraping along the rock's top, kneeling up and scrambling down the side from ledge of rock to ledge of rock below.

He sat down on a shelf of rock close to the water. It was just low enough so that his feet hung in the water. "Ooo," how cool it felt! Marash swung both legs up and down, striking the water flat each time and sending up enormous drops and jets all around him.

Then he heard a shout, a call, "Marash!" He looked up, saw two boys, his cousin Prentash and another boy, from Drishti, Marash knew, because he wore the clothes that boys wore in that village. Looser they were and made of lighter cloth than Prentash's tight wool garments and round his waist the Drishti boy wore a wound belt of red and white and on his head the cap the Mussulmans must always wear—a high red cap of felt—a fez it was.

"Long may you live!" the boys called back and forth. "T'y ngiat tjieta!" it sounded on the air. This was their way of saying "Hello, there!"

"Praise to the feet that brought you," called Marash, and to Prentash, "What blessing of good luck made you come here?"

Marash scrambled to his feet and both the boys ran down the hilly shore to meet him. Prentash and he touched hands and then each leaned his cheek near to the other's cheek as they had seen their fathers do with relatives or very dear friends sometimes.

"This is Rexh Delija," said Prentash, "Delij of Drishti. He has goats near here. They're grazing now and he has a chance to swim with you and me."

"Good, fine," said Marash. "Hurry, then. Get ready, both of you. My things I have hidden in the bushes there; lay yours beside them."

Prentash quickly undressed. He wore loose trousers like Marash under his woolen ones. He rolled them up the same way.

Marash stood by. "How did you know, Prentash, that I was coming here to-day? Your house is far from ours. I had no way to tell you that I wanted you to come."

Prentash laughed. "I'll tell you how I knew. We had guests last night—two men from Shoshi—they had had coffee that day with your uncle Prenk on the upper trail. He'd told them of the plan and your plan, too, and they told us. So here I am."

"Fine weather for a swim," said Rexh. "I can't stay long. I mustn't let my goats get lost. I won't

take off these cotton clothes of mine. They're thin. I'll go in just as I am now and let the things dry on me afterwards. The air's so dry they won't stay wet for long and I shall be the cooler for the drying." Rexh was a big boy, bigger than the others.

They all ran over to the river, climbed down the rocks, splashed in. Cold it felt at first. It made them gasp a second; then it felt warmer, but still cool and fresh on their hot bodies. Marash loved the feel of it.

"Let's race!" called Prentash.

"Start here on the gravel bar," said Rexh, and all the boys climbed out on a strip of sand and pebbles reaching from the Kiri's other shore into mid-stream. "Up to the bridge and back will be the race."

"Here is the starting place," and Marash drew a line in the sand close to the water. Each put his toes on it. "You count for us, Rexh."

"One, two, three, go!" called Rexh, and in they plunged, throwing themselves into the river current. Upstream to Ura Mezit they struck out. Marash and Prentash kept along the shore but Rexh swam where the water flowed faster, near the center of the stream. Marash worked hard and kept ahead of Prentash. Rexh was held back a little by the current. He had not thought it would push against him so.

But he made fair headway, swimming stronger than the others.

Marash reached the bridge as soon as Rexh but he was out of breath and had a hard time turning round. Once he was headed down the stream he felt the push of the current helping him. If only he was not so winded he could go much faster now. He tried but gave it up. He'd have to take it slowly. Rexh was a good way in front. And Prentash—where was he? He had been a long way behind Marash at first and at the bridge they'd seen him when they turned. By now he must have reached the bridge and turned himself. Suddenly Marash heard the splash of water and hard breathing close behind. And even as he wondered if Prentash could be so near he saw him passing with a strong stroke tearing through the water. He wasn't tired, for he had gone easily upstream, not fast. Little by little Marash saw him gaining on Rexh in front. Rexh was having trouble with his loose trousers. They kept twisting around his knees and kept him from kicking freely.

Prentash drove on, his breath now nearly gone. A moment he swam side by side with Rexh and then—on past he went, using his last strength now, and keeping his eyes fixed on the bar that marked the race's end. Rexh made one last shove, trying to

catch up, but he was too late. Prentash reached the bar and climbed out, shouting the words used on the mountain trails for mountain going, "Slowly, slowly; little by little!" "Kadal, kadal; kapak, kapak!"

"We're beaten, Marash," Rexh called back. He climbed out. Marash followed, throwing himself flat on his back and panting hard. They all were out of breath.

"That was the longest swim I ever made," said Marash when he had the breath to speak.

"Drishti is vanquished," admitted Rexh, and laughed. "Glory to Shala tribe!" Standing heels together in front of him, he gave a mock salute to Prentash.

"Well, Drishti Long-legs," Prentash answered back, "what did you think you'd get from mountaineers? You valley people call us savages." Prentash's eyes sparkled triumphantly. "Well, savages can swim, hey, Drishti?"

Rexh gave the champion a flashing glance and smiled, showing white teeth. Then he said, "I'll show you something worth a swim or two." He pointed across the river. "See that big rock? The high one by the pool? I'll jump from there. Come, see if you'll do that."

Marash and Prentash bounded to their feet. "Go

on, Rexh, do it!" cried Prentash, and Marash said, "My father tells me underneath the rock the pool is deep, six times as deep as I am tall."

"Better for me," said Rexh. Off he raced, splashing to the shore.

They saw him climb swiftly up the sloping back of the big rock and then, almost before the boys could make out what he did, he towered on the stone's edge, standing straight an instant; then, leaping high out over Kiri, straight he fell, feet first, his heels together, arms stretched high above his head, down like a shot—struck the smooth water—vanished as it closed over him.

Marash gasped. Where was Rexh? Ripples in a circle showed where he had struck the water. Then he saw him through the clear pool. Up he came and spluttered, shook his head, and gave a great breath through his nose. Up on the bank he clambered. "Whew!" he said gustily.

Marash and Prentash went across to where he sat.

"See how it goes?" said Rexh. "You're up and in then out before you know it. You go so fast it takes your breath. You haven't time for thinking."

"What's it like underneath?" asked Marash eagerly.

"All greenish," Rexh replied, "and if you look up through the water the sun shows like a dim spot of light."

Marash looked at him wonderingly.

Rexh urged them both to try the jump but both boys shook their heads.

"Let's swim and dive for stones," suggested Prentash.

In they went, and where the water was not very deep yet deep enough they dove down after stones. First Rexh and then Prentash brought up a stone. Marash tried hard but could not reach the bottom try as he would.

Prentash said, "I can't see anything down there. My eyes are shut."

"You'd better keep them open," Rexh advised. "There are a lot of rocks down there and if you don't watch out you'll crack that melon-head of yours and you'll be sorry."

"Oh, will I?" said Prentash, and made a lunge at Rexh to duck him if he could. The two went under and came up again spluttering and laughing. "You're it now," cried Prentash, "and whoever's caught has to be ducked. Look out, Marash!" and Prentash made off through the water with a great splashing.

Marash got ducked and then he was it, and so the game went on with yells and laughter and the sound of churned water.

Tired out at last, they all stretched out on the green soft grass back of the thorn bushes. Prentash had brought no lunch so Marash gave him half his own. Rexh said good-bye. "It's long past noon; I've got to find my goats. I've been here long enough. Good-bye, you Shala men. Stop for the night with us in Drishti. We have no pork, perhaps, but we can make fine feast of mutton."

Both the boys thanked him and then called after him the parting wishes of good luck and easy going. Then they munched in happiness together their cheese and cornbread. Hungry as wolves they were.

"The Kiri makes you hollow as a cow's horn," said Prentash, taking another piece of bread.

"The sun shows afternoon," Marash observed. "My father's coming back this way from Skodra and ought to be here soon."

"I'll walk along with you then," said Prentash; "I took the trail with three friends of my father's from Merturi who passed through our village this morning early on their way to the bazaar."

They finished the last crumb and stretched out

on their backs looking into the blue sky lazily. Hawks with a glint of orange feathers winged high above them.

"Hi, Marash!" someone called.

The boys sat up. Looking toward the bridge where the voice came from they saw Palok, Prenk, and Len, the donkey with them.

Palok walked down to where the boys stood while Len and Prenk sat down on the bridge wall. Prenk lit a cigarette and Len took out her knitting, letting the donkey wander where he could nibble at the grass.

Palok and Prentash greeted one another. Then Palok turned to Marash, questioning, "Was the rock high, Marash?"

"Too high," Marash answered, smiling at his father, "but a boy was here from Drishti and he jumped. I watched him go."

"I'll take the jump myself," said Palok. "Come up the rock with me."

He slipped out of his heavy clothing and went up the back of the big rock. The boys went after him.

Then Palok stood as they had seen Rexh stand, and counting, "One, two, three!" he leaped up in the air and out clear of the rock over the river. Marash and Prentash leaned to see him strike the

pool. Another minute and he was out again, and then he stood beside them.

"The pool is deep enough," he said.

Marash looked at him. Dripping wet he was, strong-looking as he stood there showing his white teeth in a slow smile. His eyes met Marash's and Marash looked back steadily. A feeling came up in him. Suddenly he felt as strong as Palok, and as brave as he.

"I'll do it now," he said, and ran straight to the edge, stood a bare second, jumped out, down. A rushing past his ears, and then the water of the pool came up to meet him and he felt himself buried in deep coolness, all around him green, and above a dim green light—the sun. He thrashed his arms and legs, climbing to reach that light. Up he rose, nearer—nearer—and out—at last, just as he thought his lungs would burst for air.

Ears, eyes, and nose full of the wet and taste of Kiri water, he took a great breath through his mouth then blew out through his nose water and air as he had seen Rexh do and then looked up to see Palok and Prentash looking down at him.

"It's done!" he called, exulting.

"It's done!" called back Palok, and Prentash danced in his excitement, waving both arms at

Marash down below and crying, "Rrnoft! Rrnoft!" "Hurrah" that was.

As they dressed in the bushes Marash hummed an old song softly to himself. It was about the brave men of Shala tribe and how they had fought their enemies and won. The words he'd half forgotten, but they came back to him as he sang now.

The three walked over to the bridge. Prentash ran ahead. Marash walked beside Palok, flicking the bushes with his donkey whip.

"That was a good swim," said Marash.

His father moved his head from side to side to nod a yes.

"I have made friends with the rock at last," Marash said, contentment in his voice.

Palok looked down at him. "Just now," he said, "you sang a song about my father, your grandfather. Ded his name was. He was so brave they made that song to him long years ago, and now all through the mountains people sing that song remembering him."

They reached the others.

Prenk and Len greeted them.

Prenk gave the donkey into Marash's care. His load was smaller.

"We walk till dark," said Prenk, "and lodge to-night with friends. You boys can drive the donkey.

Take him on ahead. Len will follow. Palok and I will come behind. There is much for us to talk about—Skodra was full of news to-day—so you make sure your charge does not bother any one of us.”

Marash snapped his leather whip against the donkey's hairy side. “Go on, old cucumber,” he shouted as he'd heard men shout in the bazaar.

Prentash took the donkey by his rope and with one hand pulled at a long hairy ear. “Get out of here,” he cried.

And off they started up the stony trail, mile after mile, toward home.



CHAPTER XIII

BOR AND MARASH GO TRAVELING

IT'S a big river," said Bor.

"Yes," said Marash, "but we will get across all right. You wait and see."

The children were curled up in one corner of the dark room. Marash's father and mother, Palok and Zina, and Bor's father and mother, Gjok and Dani, and Lul the baby were with them. Somewhere in the darkness they all slept soundly while Bor and Marash lay awake whispering softly to each other.

They were traveling, all of them. Two days now since they had left the village of Gimaj. To-night,

after a great climb, they had come to Qerim's house. Qerim was the brother of Bor's mother and had been glad to see them all. He had a large family of his own, a wife and five sons and a little daughter, but he had welcomed Bor and Marash and Lul and the four grown-ups—welcomed them heartily, and they had all feasted on white cornmeal and melted butter eaten with wooden spoons from big wooden bowls. Good, it had tasted after all those hours on the trail.

Bor and Marash loved this journeying. Each night they slept in a new house they'd never seen before, ate other people's food, and heard their songs. Then walked all day on trails they'd never followed, through valleys strange to them, and over necks—they called the mountain passes—where they could look out over miles of country rugged as their own but not the same.

Sometimes the trail took them on rocky paths, sometimes through woods where soft earth gave their feet most pleasant going—"as soft as thick blankets folded," Bor told Marash. And sometimes the hills and slopes of mountains were so bare of trees and grass that they could follow with their eyes the winding ribbon of the trail ahead of them for miles, and they could see how it wound all about, skirting

steep mountainsides and dropping out of sight into a valley, and after, showing plain again on a far slope just a thin wavy little streak of path.

They had crossed many mountain streams swollen with spring rain and melting snow. Often these streams were narrow rushing torrents splashing and falling in between the rocks and tumbling down the hillside noisily. Often Bor could hear and Marash, too, the roaring sound of water over stones before they reached the place itself where the stream ran. Once there they saw the water wild and swift, furiously rushing by.

"It's hurrying so," said Bor.

"Look," said Marash, "it tries to push this big stone in its path out of its way but the big stone is strong and won't be moved, and so the water rushes over it and drowns it."

"Yes," Bor cried back through the water's sound, "the stream is angry at that stubborn stone—I hear its voice—scolding, splashing in anger—trying to get by."

Sometimes Palok or Gjok would pick the children up, carry them pickaback through the deep water. This was great fun—to ride so safely on Gjok's strong back and look down at the raging stream below.

Bor held her father tight. "The water wants me, Father. It's splashing high up your legs trying to reach me."

"It is not strong enough to get you," Gjok told her, and set her safely on the far side.

Sometimes the stones were big and high enough above the streams for Bor and Marash to step over on them. This was the greatest game of all. They took off socks and their goatskin moccasins, for bare feet made it safer—toes could cling—and choosing a good stone to start from they would take a big stretching step to reach the next one, balance there a second, choosing where to step, and then reach out again, another step, and so from stone to stone until they were across.

Sometimes they'd argue. Bor would tell Marash: "That reddish stone there is the safest one." "No, no," Marash would answer, "I don't think it is. That flat one at the side is steadier." And so Bor would try hers and Marash his or else one would take advice and change his plan. Rounded stones were slippery, hard to stand on. Other stones looked steady till you stepped and then they were wobbly and made you lose your balance. Often a foot slipped in and once Marash went tumbling in and lost his breath in the strong flowing stream so that Palok must lift

him from the shallow water and carry him safe ashore.

All this was part of mountain traveling. The two agreed that journeying was much more fun than staying home or even going to the Friar's school. Each day was different. Bor and Marash thought this a fine way of living.

Now it was night, and one day more would see them at a great festival across the river—the Feast of St. George. Bor and Marash whispered in their corner.

“I know how it will be,” said Marash. “We will all go into the church and your father and my father and all the other men will leave their rifles outside the door leaning against the church wall. Inside a church there are no enemies. My father will kneel perhaps beside a man who is his enemy but they will kneel as friends.”

“I know,” said Bor, “Gjok, my father, told me when we left our house that there would be no danger on the trail, that all the travelers we'd meet would be our friends no matter what their tribe.”

“We make a ‘bessa’ for a feast like this,” explained Marash. “A ‘bessa’ you know, Bor, that means a sworn word of peace, and all are friendly while the ‘bessa’ lasts.”

"Yes, I know, Marash. Go on, tell me now what happens after church is done."

"Oh, church will last a long time, Bor, but you will like the singing and the prayers full of strange words. And you will love to see the priest. He dresses all in red trimmed with bright gold. They're very beautiful, the things he wears—all gay and colored like a woman from the valley villages near Skodra."

"All bright and pretty—not just black and white like mountain clothing." Bor nodded in the dark; she knew those black-haired women in their colored dress shining with red and yellow and clean white that dazzled.

"And there'll be all sorts of prayers and songs," Marash went on. "We'll sing all those songs the Friar taught us when we were at school."

"That will be fun," said Bor, "I know those words."

"And after it is over, we'll go out," said Marash, "the men will hang their rifles on their backs again, and then——"

"What then?" Bor's voice was eager.

"Then we will have a great feast—likely the cooking will be done in the priest's kitchen or the chief's house—anyway, there'll be a lot of mutton, rice, and maybe pork to eat, and talk, and songs that tell

great stories of brave men. Cheese there will be, too, and rakia that the men drink from those tiny glasses. Cigarettes they'll smoke stuck in long silver holders like the ones Palok and Gjok have. We children will not be forgotten, either, there will be honey cakes, and we can play 'flagman,' and 'hare and hunter,' and those games we learned at school, perhaps. It will be two days maybe before we start back home."

"But listen now, Marash"—Bor touched his arm in the pitch dark of the room—"listen: I can hear the river roaring even here. It's spring, and there is all the melting snow from the high mountains running down to swell the river water. How can we get across to where the feast is? I heard Palok say to my father that here there is no bridge at all."

"I don't know what we'll do," answered Marash, "but I am sure that there will be a way. Maybe some boats will be there by the bank. To-night when we were sitting by the fire I heard your uncle Qerim telling them about some boats."

"Yes, I heard, too," said Bor. "I heard him say that all the boats across at Mark Sakoli's had gone down river to St. George's Feast at Dushmani."

"There are no bridges. I am sure of that." Marash was thoughtful.

"Drin is very full," reminded Bor again.

"There'll be a way, I'm sure of that." Marash turned over on the rug that served them for a bed. "We'd better sleep now, Bor, or dawn will come too soon for us. Good-night."

"Good-night, Marash, sleep well," Bor answered, turning herself until the hard earth floor felt comfortable beneath her.

Then they slept.

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When Bor and Marash woke the rest were drinking breakfast coffee out of the tiny cups. Dani gave them each a piece of cornbread.

Gjok smiled at them. "What dreams had you—what did you see in the night?" he asked. "You children must have traveled far away it took so long for you to get back here to us and wake."

Bor and Marash smiled back and munched the cornbread happily enough.

To-day there'd be great goings on with River Drin to cross!

They sat and nibbled bread in Qerim's house, much pleased with everything.

They heard the river roaring down below. "That is no mountain stream, that is the Drin!" said Marash, an excitement in his voice.

Bor caught her breath and laughed. "Nobody'll carry us on pickaback across that giant river."

"Indeed they won't," said Marash. "It is deep. I heard them say last night two men, one on the other's shoulders, could not reach bottom. And the rains and snow have made it wider than it ever was. No bridge could bridge it."

"They'll have to find a boat for us," said Bor. "We can't turn home now even for River Drin, big as he is."

"They'll manage. Just you wait," assured Marash.

The children saw their parents getting ready now to start. Qerim and three sons were coming, too. Good-byes were said and wishes for the trail as usual were given. Then they went outside, taking the path that led down to the river.

Down—down—down—and now Marash could see the water of the Drin.

"Look, Bor," he cried to her, "look down. See, there is the monster Drin roaring along."

Bor looked and saw the swift tawny river, flecked with foam eddies, yellow with the mud washed from the hills.

"Ugh," said Bor, and gave a little shiver. "What a fierce voice he has! I'm sure he doesn't want to let us pass to reach Iballje and the Feast."



BOR



"We'll show him we are men, and mountain men—Sons of the Eagle—and that we aren't afraid of any river's raging," Marash said bravely.

On down they went.

The bank of Drin was steep and rocky. Over just across gravel and sand made a level shore.

Palok said to Gjok, "There's a fine landing place for us across."

And Marash said to Bor, "See over on that side's the place they mean to take us to once they have boats."

Bor raised her hand and pointed at the Drin. "Look, Marash, look, such yellow colored water!"

"Muddy," said Marash; "rain does that, washing down sand and mud; and all the new streams made by melting snow carry along more earth till Drin is full."

"How fast and wild it goes." Bor stood looking, Marash beside her gazing, too.

The big river ran furiously by them, swirling in foamy pools, racing along. The water passed them faster than Bor's quick eyes could follow it. It rushed—roared—tumbled by. A little farther down big rocks were in its path; it raged around and over them, shouting as water shouts, with noisy splashes, angry bubblings.

"Oh," shuddered Bor, "it makes me feel afraid. It is so huge and flows so swift and strong. It's savage, too, and fearful—it would like to eat us up, all of us."

Marash laughed. "It won't get a chance. Hear what they say."

Bor listened.

Her father Gjok was speaking.

"You go, Palok, to that hill on the left and call across to Mark. Tell him we need some sort of boat—that there are ten of us to cross the water."

Marash's father left the group and climbed off up a path to the right of them.

"Mark has the boats," Marash told Bor. "Now you will see how we shall cheat the furious old Drin out of his feast of mountaineers."

Bor watched Palok.

He reached the top of a small hill and stood facing the other shore, then raised his two hands like a cup about his mouth, ready to call.

Bor saw him take a deep, deep breath, she saw his big chest swell. And then he sent his voice out in a huge sound, making all the air ring with the great words he called. Bor strained her ears to catch the name he said but she could hardly make it out at

first because Palok had stretched and changed the words to make them carry clear across the Drin into the other valley.

She heard: "Ma-ya-ya-yark Sa-a kow-ow-ow-li!"

"Mark, Son-of-Sakol," Palok was calling. Mark was the boatman. He would bring a boat.

Palok called again and then again. Always at the end his voice and breath would break together in a kind of gasp—"like sobbing," Bor thought to herself. "Why does he do that, Marash?" she whispered.

"Sh," said Marash, his eyes on Palok.

Then they heard again the name go trembling out in great waves of sound to the hills across the Drin.

Then Palok waited.

"He is resting now," Marash told Bor. "He has to rest. He told me once that telephoning mountain style like that tires a man's voice, uses up his breath. There's such a force of breath back of his words—that's why he gasps that way after each call. There's nothing left to breathe with when he's done, his lungs are empty."

"Hark, Marash," Bor said suddenly, "I can hear Marku answering us now. Listen!"

They heard a voice.

"I can see him, on a hillside halfway up," Marash pointed over the river. "See, Bor?"

Sure enough. There was a man standing over there, far away he was, and yet his voice reached to them. He called as Palok had, "telephoning" back. Sounds came in waves, but neither of the children listening could make out words or meaning. Palok could. He was used to this sort of talking over valleys and across the hills. He understood and answered and Mark, Son-of-Sakol, standing far off, called back.

Palok came down the little hill back to the others.

"Marku has a boat and says he'll bring it here to us," he told them.

So everyone sat comfortably to wait and rested. Men lit their cigarettes, the women knitted. Bor and Marash sat watching the sandy shore across the Drin.



CHAPTER XIV

BOR AND MARASH CROSS THE DRIN

AFTER a while they saw two men come down the hillside carrying between them what looked like a mass of sticks and heavy twigs.

"It is something woven together," said Bor, squinting up her eyes to see. "It's like a piece of wicker fencing that the men edge the cornfield with."

"Yes," Marash agreed, "it is, and it is flat, not curved and hollow like the boats I've seen in Skodra on the Lake."

"Perhaps it's not a boat at all," said Bor.

Marash looked hard. "Why—Bor——"

"What, what, Marash?"

"That's not a boat—it's just flat woven branches—wicker work——"

"A raft?" said Bor.

"Yes, just a raft," he answered.

"Oh, Marash," Bor gasped a bit saying it, "Marash, how will they dare go on the angry Drin with just a raft—flimsy—of branches?"

"You wait. They'll make it safe somehow," said Marash, frowning a little. "Let's watch."

They fixed their eyes on the two men. The men had reached the flat shore of the river across from the high rocky bank the children sat on.

Bor and Marash could see now that they carried other things besides the woven raft.

"Skins they have, Marash," whispered Bor, "what will they do with skins?"

The two men set the raft down on the ground and began working with the skins.

"I can make out now what they are," said Marash. "They are goatskins with the hair turned inside."

"Look how the men bite at them," said Bor, surprised to see one of the men put the skin to his mouth.

They watched him, puzzled, and eager to see what would come next.

As the man held his mouth to the skin it began slowly to swell. It swelled and swelled, getting fatter and fatter like a fat bag of air.

"See," exclaimed Bor, "that skin is like a bag. There is no hole except where he is blowing. They have sewn it up and tied the legs and closed up the neck where the head has been cut off."

"Yes, I can see plainly now," said Marash. "No air can get out once he's blown it in."

"How fat it gets, that little goat," laughed Bor.

Marash laughed, too. "It looks like a fat goat," he said, "a bursting little goat with stubby legs."

"And with no head at all," said Bor.

Marash shaded his eyes with his hand, trying to see more.

"There are to be more goats, fat like the first, see, both the men are blowing at a skin," said Marash.

The children watched.

On the farther shore the two men worked hard with the stiff brown leather of the skins, blowing air through their mouths into each hide and tying up the opening they'd put their mouth to once the skin was full. The blown-up hides bounced all about the ground like rubber balls when they were done. Bor counted eight of them.

"They are so full of air they dance," she laughed.

"They're light now," said Marash, "they wouldn't even sink if they were thrown into the Drin."

Now the men took the goat balloons they'd made and laid them against the raft one by one, fastening them on the under side of the wicker flooring. They fixed them in two rows, four in each row.

Marash scowled. "What is the sense of that?" he asked himself.

Bor looked at him. "Why do they tie the air bags underneath?" she asked him.

Suddenly his face cleared.

"Watch now," he said.

Bor looked. She saw one man carrying the raft down to the water. As he carried it she could plainly see the fat brown goatskins fastened in two rows. The man wore only his white loose shirt. He had left off his heavy clothes. Now he waded out right into deep Drin water holding the raft close to him as he went. The water rose high about him. As it deepened he leaned suddenly and set the raft upon it, the goatskins on the under side in the water. He waded on up to his shoulders, holding to the raft and pushing it before him with two hands. The bobbing goatskins made the wicker raft float high above the surface of the river.

"See," said Marash, "those leather bags of air

make the raft sit high and safe above the Drin. Those goats don't like the water. See, the raft bobs lightly on the top."

Bor saw. "Oh, it's a real boat now," she cried. "People could sail safely on it now. He's swimming now, Marash. He holds the raft and pushes at the water with his legs."

"He's making for our bank, but see, Bor, how the water tries to take him farther down the shore." Marash stood up to watch the swimming boatman.

The water raged by as before. The light raft pitched and tossed in the swift current. But the swimmer held to it, pushing through the flood, nearer and nearer toward the high rocks of the bank, working his way.

"He's landed," cried Marash, and Bor on tiptoe standing by him called, "Rrnoft!" That meant "Hurrah!"

Gjok and Palok and their two wives, and Qerim and his sons and Bor and Marash all scrambled down the shore to where the man had landed with his boat. Nik was his name, and they all greeted him and gave him thanks and welcome for his coming.

Poor Nik was dripping wet and cold and shivering for Drin water was like ice this time of year. He waited by the edge, holding his raft on end.

"Glory to your strong arms and body, Nik," said Palok. "Old Drin can't win against swimming like yours."

Nik thanked him for the praise. "Who will go over first with me?" he asked.

Palok said, "Gjok, you go first with the children."

Bor looked at Marash. Softly she said so no one else could hear, "Oh, Marash, that Drin is deep and cold. Look how Nik shivers there! We'll bob around on those blown-up skins and tip and toss. Suppose we should upset?"

"It must be safe enough," Marash said, reassuring, "Nik has made other trips before this trip. See, he is looking underneath the raft and making sure the skins are fastened tight."

Nik bent above the raft turned upside down on the rocks below them. Tough strips of bark he'd used to tie the goatskins with and one of these he worked with as they watched, making it tighter.

Marash and Bor climbed farther down and went up near to see.

"Eight fat brown goats," Bor gave a little laugh, "and all without any heads."

"See how stiff their stubby legs stick out," said Marash. "Feel how hard and slippery they are—all full of air."

Bor felt. The leather bag was stretched and hard under her fingers.

"Be careful," Nik advised. "Don't let a single strip of bark get loose. If air leaked out the raft would go all tipsy in the water and you'd spill off."

Then he called to Gjok, "Come, Gjok, I'll take you and the youngsters for the first passengers."

Bor forgot the funny little goats. Her eyes went to the river rushing past. Her heart beat faster.

Marash stepped forward eagerly, his face shining with pleasure. He did not feel afraid; instead the danger of going made him feel excited, glad, somehow.

"How shall I sit, Nik, cross-legged?" he asked.

Nik put the raft in the water where it was shallow at the edge. He waded in, holding it close to the rock where Marash stood.

"Step on the raft now, Marash," he explained, "and don't sit down at all. Lay yourself flat—lie on your stomach. We will tie you fast to the wicker part so you'll be safe from slipping."

Marash crouched and crawled out on the raft. It bobbed and wiggled under him and Nik held it as steady as he could. Marash knelt down, then straightened himself out, lying flat as Nik had told him to.

"Move over to this side," said Nik. "We've got to have room for Gjok and Bor."

Marash wriggled to one side.

Nik directed, "Hold to the outside edge and let your chin come close to where your hands are. You'll see the Drin right underneath your nose."

Marash gave a little chuckle of delight and squirmed his way up to the very edge, holding tight and looking right down in the water flowing under him.

"Stick up your feet, Marash," said his father, watching from the shore, "you don't want to drag your toes in the river."

Marash bent his knees so that his legs were waving in the air.

"Now I'm all right," he called. "Come on, Bor, this is fine!"

"No," Gjok said, "I must take the middle place to make us balance. We'll ride more level that way."

Then Gjok lay down just as Marash was lying holding the edge and sticking up his feet.

"Now, Bor," he called to her.

All this time Bor had been watching them without a word. She didn't like this flimsy-looking raft that wiggled on the water. Through the woven floor of it the water showed plainly, racing under it. She wished with all her heart there was another way to get across the Drin to the Feast in Iballje.

While Marash had been fixing himself in place Bor had stood wondering what to do. Suppose she told them all she was afraid to go—and didn't dare? What would they all think of a mountaineer afraid to travel on a mountain boat? They'd call her city-girl, a lowlander, a "white heart," "'fraid-cat," perhaps. She couldn't bear those names. No, she would have to go, afraid or not. Her breath came fast. She took a little step nearer the water. The river was so wide, so swift, so angry. Maybe going back Nik would lose hold and they'd go whirling down with the current—tumbling, floundering, drowning in the wild flood. She stood rooted. She *could* not go.

And then she heard her father saying, "Come, Bor."

She looked and saw him there, lying face down as Marash lay, his elbows on the raft's edge and his head raised up to see Bor where she stood so still above him.

"Now, Bor," he said again.

His steady blue eyes looked into her own. To Bor it seemed the raft was quiet for a minute on the water. "He knows that I'm afraid to come," she thought. "He knows—but he won't let the others know, and I shan't, either." She took a brave step forward—set one foot on the unsteady raft. It felt

firmer than it looked—it took her weight. Her father watched her. She could feel his eyes. She stepped more freely. She could feel her fear fading away. She knelt, lay down beside him—close, so that she touched him just a little bit. She breathed deeply. Now she was all right. No matter what the old Drin did to them she was safe now with Gjok beside her. And now he knew she could act brave even with fear inside her. She would not lie too near him. She wanted him to know she dared to take her place the same as Marash and the rest.

She raised her feet and with both hands clutched the edge of the wicker work. Palok had taken off his long wound belt and she could feel how he was tying it from one side of the raft to the other, across their legs to hold them tight—strapped down. When the raft tipped they could not tumble off then. Bor felt it tight against her. That was good.

Nik pushed the raft out in the deeper water.

Bor shut her eyes a minute. The sound of swirling water filled her ears and through the roaring she could faintly hear Nik's panting breath as he swam hard, pushing the raft ahead. She opened her eyes, looked down. Her chin was almost in the water, for the raft loaded so heavily floated close to the surface now. Underneath her very nose old Drin was whirl-

ing, muddy and foaming. Dizzy it made her, watching it go by so near her eyes. She felt cold water on her knees. The Drin was trying for a nibble, after all.

Nik swam, the water raced, and Bor held on. Happy she was, excited like Marash. She was a mountaineer, child of the Mountain Eagle, as they said. This was how mountaineers crossed rivers—fearlessly—on bobbing wiggly rafts; nothing between them and the angry flood but slim woven branches and—"eight fat brown hairless goats," she said to herself, and raised her head a bit to see if she could see Marash.

Then suddenly they landed!

There was Nik all cold and dripping wet, and underneath her nose through shallow water gravelly sand showed. They were all across! Nik was untying them. Bor felt his hands shake with the cold as he undid the cloth. All three of them stood up.

Bor smiled at Marash. He was smiling, too.

"That was a great ride, Bor," he said. "My knees are wet, are yours?"

Bor leaned and felt them, laughed. "Yes, mine are, too. The old Drin tried to get a bite at us, didn't he?"

Her father took her hand.

"How's that for sailing, Bor?" He looked down at her, smiling as she looked up.

Bor said, "Father, the boats in Skodra aren't like that. They have high sides that keep the water out. I saw them on the Lake there. In such boats you ride as safe as on a donkey's back."

"Yes," answered Gjok, "I've seen that sort of boat. It takes no bravery to go in them over the water."

"Such a boat would never do for mountaineers," said Bor. "People like us must have a different kind."

Bor and her father walked along the beach. Marku, Nik's friend, had built a fire to warm the frozen swimmer. Now Nik stood before it trying to warm himself. Bor and her father walked toward him, silent for a minute. Then Gjok said: "Mountain things for mountain people, Bor; and mountain courage for a mountain heart. That's as it should be."

Bor's heart beat happily. Her feet skipped without her knowing it. She could not remember now the heavy feeling of her fear. She felt all light inside. Her heart was a mountain heart, like Marash's, and like her father's, too, daring and brave. How glad she was!

She saw Marash carrying wood to keep the fire going. She'd help. She found a heavy stick and raised it, lugging with both arms. Big as it was it did not feel heavy to her. Her arms had never felt so strong

before. She laid it on a pile of sticks near to the fire. Marash followed her and left his load as she had.

Marku was going back now with the raft instead of Nik.

"They will take turns going," said Marash, "so that neither one will get too cold from swimming in that icy river."

Marku held the raft in front of him. He set it in the water, wading out.

"There go the eight brown goats without their heads," said Bor.

"We came over on the backs of them," said Marash, laughing.

"Nik was the goatherd driving them," said Bor, and laughed, too, at the thought.

"Blind goats," Marash went on, "no heads, no eyes. And yet they swim better than we can swim."

"Let's sit close to the edge and watch," suggested Bor.

They ran to where a rock close to the Drin made a high seat for them.

"That's my mother coming now," said Marash, "they have to fasten down Lul's cradle, too."

"Qerim is coming with her," said Bor.

They watched the bobbing little raft making its way across.

"We ought to make a prayer to St. Nicholas," said Marash. "I have heard them say St. Nicholas takes care of all the sailors and any one who travels over water."

Bor made a holy sign with her right hand and to herself prayed to the saint who guarded all brave people sailing. Marash did the same.

Qerim and Zina and the baby Lul landed just as they had, safe and sound.

It took three journeys more before they all were over.

"Good-bye, old Drin," called Marash as they took the trail leading to Iballje.

"Good-bye, you noisy rushing thing," called Bor, the last to leave. "You must be stronger than you are to catch us mountaineers!" and up the path she raced after the rest.



CHAPTER XV

THE STORY OF QEHA

TELL us, Grandmother," teased Bor.
"Your heads are full enough now, what with all your school learning," said the old woman, stirring the fire with a blackened stick.

Marash shook his head. "No, no, they are never full enough. They can always stretch to take in more. Tell us the story."

Bor's grandmother was sitting on a little three-legged stool by the fire, knitting, knitting on a thick new sweater for Bor. Marash squatted by the hearth near her playing a sort of cat's cradle with a bit of

worsted; and Bor, her chin resting on one knee drawn up against her, sat on the other side of her grandmother looking into the fire.

Now she turned a bit and put her hand on the old woman's arm. "Do tell about Qeha," she begged.

"It is a long story," said her grandmother, and looked at the two children, her needles flying fast without her watching them.

"Not too long for to-day, for the rain will last longer," said Marash. "Listen how it pours!"

The three of them by the fire heard the sweeping sound of the rain outside, drenching the fields and rocks and beating on the thatched roof over them. The storm had begun that morning and now it was past noon and still the rain fell. Bor's father and mother and baby brother had gone off on the trail at dawn to get some medicine from the Friar in the village across the river. Marash had come to go with Bor to school but the rain had kept them home and now sitting by the hearth they three were all alone and undisturbed.

"Ooo!" exclaimed Bor, shutting her ears a moment with her hands, "it *is* a storm, and we all safe and warm inside," and she chanted a mountain rhyme that all the children knew:

"Shi, shi per Maltsi,
Bor, bor per Maltsor."

It meant,

"Rain, rain for the mountains,
Snow, snow for the mountaineer."

"Let it rain," said Marash; "stories sound best when rain is falling."

"Yes, Grandmother, this is the day for Qeha," and Bor peered again into her grandmother's face.

The old woman looked into the red coals, her long steel needles click-clicking in the wool as she worked. She smiled as if to herself.

"I'll tell you about her, then," she said, "just as I heard my own grandmother tell the story to me long ago one rainy day in autumn when I was only as tall as Bor is now. Listen, this is

THE STORY OF QEHA

Once there was a big family of nine brothers and one sister. Never mind the names of the brothers, for the story is not about them. It is about their sister. Her name was Qeha. She was very, very beautiful, more beautiful than the sun.

"She is too beautiful," said the nine brothers to each other. "Someone will steal her away from us. We must keep her safe." So they had a glass cage made for her and there they kept her.

Near by lived a woman with two daughters, Agia and Shaqia. They were beautiful, too, but not so beautiful as Qeha. One day they looked through the glass walls of Qeha's cage and saw her.

"Yes, she is indeed beautiful," they said, "but we are more so."

"People say," said Agia, "that Qeha is the most beautiful girl in all the world. That cannot be so."

"Indeed not," answered Shaqia. "You and I are far more beautiful. Has not our mother often said so?"

"Let us ask the sun. He shall decide. He travels round the earth and sees everyone. He ought to know who is most beautiful," Agia said.

"Sun, Sun," cried the two sisters, "who is in all the world most beautiful?"

And the sun replied, "Qeha."

Then Agia and Shaqia were angry.

"The Sun knows nothing," they told each other. "It is the moon who is wisest. Let us ask him. He shines all night when the sun has gone and sees much more."

"Moon, Moon," cried the two sisters, "who is in all the world most beautiful?"

And the moon replied, "Qeha."

Then Agia and Shaqia were angry.

"Let us go home," said Agia, "and tell our mother what the sun and moon have said."

When the mother heard about it she said, "Never mind, daughters, I shall see to it that you shall be the most beautiful in the world. I will find a medicine for Qeha that will send her off into such a deep sleep that she will never wake. Then you two will indeed be the most beautiful in the world."

Going out into the garden she filled a basket with bunches of grapes. Then she picked three separate grapes and dipped them in a strong medicine. She put these grapes in the basket with the rest.

Then she went to the glass cage where Qeha lived.

"Qeha, Qeha," she called, "come out."

Qeha leaned out of a high window and said, "No, no, I cannot come out. Say what it is you want."

The woman said, "I have a present for you, beautiful one."

"I will let down a rope to you," said Qeha, "and you tie the present to it so that I may pull it up."

So Qeha let down a rope and the woman tied the basket of grapes to the end.

"Thank you," called Qeha, and pulled up the basket.

Fine bunches of grapes they were and Qeha said to herself, "I will not eat them. I will save them for my brothers to eat when they come home this evening."

Then she saw the three loose grapes lying among the others. "It will not spoil the bunches if I eat these three," she said, "just for a taste."

And she picked up one of the grapes and ate it.

It made her feel a little dizzy but its taste was so good that she picked up the second one and ate that. Now she felt drowsy, but the second grape had been so juicy that she could not resist the last one.

After she had eaten the third grape she fell into a deep, deep sleep. When her brothers came home they could not wake her.

Then they had made for her a golden case of richly carved workmanship and sealing her up in this they carried it to the fountain in the public square. They fastened Qeha in her case in the branches of a tree that shadowed the drinking pool at the base of the fountain and there they left her.

One day the horses of the King were driven to the pool to drink. As they leaned to drink they saw reflected in the water the golden case in which Qeha



THE KING COULD SEE THE SHINING GOLD OF QEHA'S CASE



slept. Frightened at seeing such a glittering sight in the water the horses refused to drink from the pool and the grooms were greatly puzzled.

They went to the King and said, "Your Majesty, no longer will the horses drink from the pool of the public fountain. It must be that the water is poisoned."

"I will go myself," said the King, "and see what it is that has frightened the horses."

So the King rode down to the pool in the square.

Looking in the pool from where he sat on his horse's back he could see the shining gold of Qeha's case gleaming in the water. He looked up into the branches of the tree and there he saw hanging the case itself.

He called his men to him and said, "Above in the branches of that tree hangs a case of fine-worked gold. Climb and get it and take it just as it is to the palace."

When the King's men had brought the case to the palace the King commanded that it be opened. "A case as beautiful as this," he said, "must contain a great treasure of rare value."

When the case was opened there lay Qeha in a deep sleep looking as beautiful as the sun.

The King was delighted with her loveliness and

called to his mother to come and behold the treasure he had found.

His mother was a very wise woman. She came and looked into the case and said to the sleeping Qeha, "How beautiful you are. May you be changed!" And at these words Qeha stirred ever so little.

Then the mother said again, "How beautiful you are. May you be changed!" And at these words Qeha opened her eyes.

Again the mother said, "How beautiful you are. May you be changed!" And this time Qeha sat up, alive and well, and more beautiful than ever.

"She shall be my wife!" exclaimed the King.

Then Qeha and the King were married and she lived with him and his mother in the royal palace. They were all very happy together.

After a time a little son was born to them. Mehmet they named him, and so happy was Qeha with her baby boy that she never thought of the two jealous sisters who had worked her such harm.

But Agia and Shaqia did not forget Qeha. Often they asked the sun and moon who was most beautiful of all the world and for a long time the answer had been, "You are." Now one day they put this question to the sun as before, "Sun, Sun, who is of all the world most beautiful?"

To their great surprise this day the sun replied, "Qeha."

Agia and Shaqia said to each other, "No, no, this cannot be true for Qeha is in a sleep so deep that she can never wake. Let us ask the moon."

So they said to the moon, "Moon, Moon, who is of all the world most beautiful?"

The moon, too, answered, "Qeha."

"Come," said Agia, "let us tell our mother of this. It must be that Qeha has waked and is alive again."

When their mother heard what the sun and moon had said she exclaimed, "Ah, then Qeha is indeed alive. I must make a new plan to get rid of her."

Then she disguised herself as an old woman hair doctor and taking with her four magic hairpins she sought out Qeha in the King's palace.

Knocking at Qeha's door she called, "Who wants a fine shampoo?"

"Come in, come in," said Qeha.

When the woman entered Qeha knew who she was and said at once, "No, no, you can do nothing for me."

The King's mother, who was sitting with Qeha, said, "The woman cannot hurt you and perhaps she has skill in hair doctoring."

"At least," said the woman, "let me dress your hair for you." And the King's mother so persuaded Qeha that she consented. Then the woman started to comb out Qeha's hair and the King's mother went into the next room to make some coffee for all of them.

The woman and Qeha were now alone and the woman dressed Qeha's hair very beautifully. As she finished she took the four magic hairpins from her pocket and stuck them into Qeha's hair, one at a time.

As she stuck in the last one Qeha was changed to a bird and flew out of the window. Then the woman got into Qeha's bed and covered herself up.

When the King's mother came in with the coffee she looked all about for Qeha and the hair doctor but neither of them was in sight. Glancing at Qeha's bed in the next room she saw someone covered up lying there. She thought it was Qeha and did not disturb her.

That night the woman crept out of Qeha's bed and went home and when the King's mother went to wake Qeha for supper she found the bed empty. She searched high and low over the palace but could not find Qeha.

The King hunted for her all over the palace

grounds and sent searchers into the town but no one could find her.

Little Mehmet cried for his mother but no one could tell him where she was.

The days went by and still Qeha did not come back.

One evening the little boy Mehmet was so unhappy that his father the King carried him out into the garden to see if he could quiet him. He sat down under a tree holding the child on his knee.

As the King sat there soothing his little son and longing to see his wife again a strange bird flew into the branches and sitting above the King sang a sweet song.

The King listened to the bird's singing and as he listened it seemed to him that he could hear words in the bird's song.

Straining his ears he heard the bird sing these words:

“Is all well in the palace?

Who cares for my boy?

My heart is in sorrow.

And lost is my joy!”

The King started to his feet and called to the bird,
“Come down here where I can hear you better.”

The bird flew down and lighting on the ground near him, sang again:

“Is all well in the palace?
Who cares for my boy?
My heart is in sorrow,
And lost is my joy!”

The King now felt sure he had found his Qeha. He called to his servants and gave orders to catch the strange bird.

The bird was easily caught and the servants carried it to the King.

He took the bird in his hand and carried it to his mother. “Mother,” he said, “this bird sings a beautiful song. Give me a cage to keep her in so that we may hear her sing.”

His mother brought him a cage and the King put the bird inside it.

“Sing once more, beautiful bird,” said the King. And the bird sang again the song:

“Is all well in the palace?
Who cares for my boy?
My heart is in sorrow
And lost is my joy!”

When the King's mother heard this she said to the bird, "How prettily you sing. May trouble drop four times from your head!"

And as she said this out dropped the four magic hairpins from the bird's feathered head and in the wink of an eye Qeha stood before them. The King kissed his wife with joy and Qeha knelt at the feet of his mother and thanked her for saving her. Then little Mehmet was brought in and Qeha was happier than she had ever been before.

After this there was no more trouble for any one and they all lived long lives in peace and happiness and Mehmet grew to be a strong young man.

The story was ended. Bor's grandmother looked at Bor and then at Marash.

"My story is done,
Now go take it to town,"

she said, wrinkling her face in a smile.

Bor leaned her head against her grandmother's arm, rubbing her cheek back and forth a minute. "Thank you, Grandmother, with all my heart," she said.

"Glory to your mouth," said Marash, "it was a

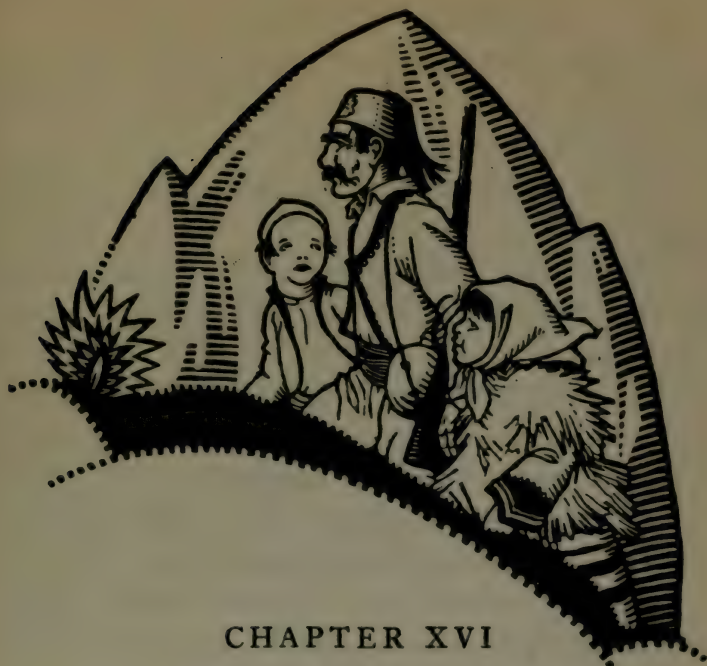
good story and I'm glad the King got his wife back safe and sound."

"Now we will have noonday bread," said the old woman, her eyes twinkling at the two of them, "and perhaps I can find somewhere a little wild honey for two good children."

She got up and Bor jumped up and ran after her to help.

"The rain brought good luck," said Marash, stirring the fire, "a story to listen to and wild honey to eat. Rrnoft!"





CHAPTER XVI

FAIRIES AND TREASURES

BUT I am sure Imer is not my uncle," insisted Marash. He was sitting beside Bor in the shadow of the house wall one hot summer day at noon.

Bor's voice was firm, answering: "He must be, Marash. See how often he is at your house. How fond your father is of him. Why, yesterday I noticed that he leaned his cheek to Imer's, rubbed it with his as women do. He nibbled at his ear," Bor laughed, remembering. "He loves him much, Marash, I know that Imer is his brother."

Marash shook his head. "No, no, not brother, something like that though, something as near as brothers but not that, I know."

"What do you mean?" asked Bor, her forehead wrinkling.

"Well," said Marash, "it's what they call blood-brother. Imer is blood-brother to Palok, my father, and Palok to him."

"Oh," said Bor, still puzzled.

"You know what that is, Bor? It's more than brothers, maybe," Marash thought.

"I've heard—something—I think. But tell, Marash, you explain just what it means."

"Imer could tell it best," Marash replied. "He's in there drinking coffee with Palok, perhaps when he comes out to take the trail——"

"Yes," Bor said eagerly, "we'll ask him then. But you, Marash, you know something about it?"

"I'll tell you what I know," answered Marash, "and you will see why I am sure that Imer is not uncle to me. It is like this, then—Imer comes from far away, another tribe, another village, another father. Even his religion is not ours. He's Mussulman, Mohammed is his prophet."

"I know about those people," Bor broke in. "My mother told me. They are Shqyptar, Children of the

Eagle, like ourselves. Their words are our words and their hearts are like our hearts, white faces, many of them." Bor said this last, meaning that these men were trustworthy and noble.

Marash went on, "Imer is of these. My father and he made friends when they were boys. They met, I think, in Skodra, at the bazaar. As boys they played, they went on visits to each other, lived in each other's houses, slept together, shared the same food," Marash hesitated, "not everything, of course," he said quickly, "Imer's religion forbids him to eat pork. My father said that in Imer's village there is not a single pig running about, and Imer doesn't like even to look at pigs."

"Yes," Bor said, "I know Mohammed's teachings make the Skodra women veil their faces even to their eyes. Their law is different from ours."

"Each keeps the law that is the law for him," said Marash. Then he went on, "Imer and Palok were friends then, and before they were full grown they took a vow, each made it to the other, it was called the Vow of Blood-brotherhood."

"What did they promise then?" asked Bor.

"It was a sort of *bessa*, but much more than that. They promised to be friends, to stick together, to be always in their hearts like brothers born."

"I see," Bor said slowly. "They chose to be brothers though they were not born so. That is why Imer is more than brother to Palok, he chose him. That's a nearer sort, I think."

"I think so, too," said Marash; "in our house Imer has more honor than a brother born." He looked at Bor. "Now, Bor, you see what I meant when I said Imer was not my uncle."

"I see," said Bor; "here comes Imer now. Let's ask him more about it."

The house door opened and out came Imer, his rifle on his shoulder, ready to start back where he had come from. Palok and Zina followed him, bidding him good-bye and wishing him a good journey.

"Where are you going, Imer?" asked Marash.

He and Bor stood up in front of him.

Imer was a tall, thin, red-haired man with light blue eyes—"written eyes," Bor and Marash called them, because you could see the lines in them so plainly, plainer than you could see in dark brown eyes that often look all brown or even black. Imer's blue eyes were laughing eyes and he was always making jokes and playing tickling games with children on the floor, or even with Palok sometimes.

"To Skodra, to be sure," answered he, "I am no longer Maltsor, Marash, I have become Skodran,

and do my work for the chief man of Skodra. I am one of his police. So I must go back to do what he commands."

"Let us go an hour on the trail with you?" Bor begged him.

"Yes," said Marash, "let me go as your escort to the valley's edge, far as the boundary of our tribal land. I promise you safe passage, peace from any foe."

Imer's face broke in a smile. "Is it your rifle then that shall protect me?" he asked, eyes twinkling.

"Not my rifle, I have none," said Marash, "not yet, but if I go with you along the trail all that shall see us will know you travel with a Shala man, and have safe-conduct from Palok through Palok's son, Marash."

"Very well," Imer agreed, "I shall be glad of that protection maybe if I should meet with enemies or strangers. Come, Escort, and you, Bor, you keep us company. Women go safe on any trail, besa or no."

They started off.

Climbing the steep trail from the river they wound along the side of the mountain. At a cleft in the hills they stopped and Imer looked down. From where they stood they could see far below them the thatched roof of Marash's house.

"Now for the good-byes," said Imer, "for with another step we shall lose sight of it."

He unslung his rifle, cocked it, and fired—three shots. Deafening they were, ringing against the rocks, echoing down.

They three stood motionless then, without a word. The echoes died. Silence. Then—one—two—three—came back Palok's three shots, answering their own.

Two more from Imer and then two more from down below, and Imer slung his gun on his shoulder and started down the other side of the ridge.

Bor and Marash followed.

The trail was more level now and Bor and Marash stayed close to Imer.

"Imer," said Marash.

"What do you say, boy?" answered Imer.

"I told Bor here that you were blood-brother to Palok."

"That's true," said Imer.

"Yes, but I could not explain exactly how you and he made yourselves blood-brothers. Tell us about it, Imer."

"We were big boys," said Imer, "nearly big enough to carry rifles; our moustaches had begun to show, but we were not yet men. Palok and I had in

our hearts such love for each other that we made up our minds that we would be as close as born brothers of one family, with blood the same. So one day—it was on the way to Skodra, by Mesi Bridge—we were sitting under one of those small arches in the shade—one day we made the Brothers' Vow and Palok took his knife, the one he carries now, and made a little cut in his own arm so that it bled. I put my mouth to it and swallowed some of the blood. In that way his blood—the same you have, Marash—went into me.”

“And then——?” Bor’s eyes were wide.

Imer had stopped and Marash, who had been ahead, turned round and looked at him.

“And then,” Imer went on, “I took my knife and made a cut in my arm just as he had done and he took blood from that cut as I’d done from his.”

“And after that—you were brothers of one blood,” Marash said.

“Yes, brothers who had in them the same blood and so were close related,” said Imer. “Blood, as you know, is honor, so the honor of Palok was mine to guard and mine was his. From that time on my enemies were Palok’s and my friends his friends, and all who were his foes became my foes and every friend of his was friend to me. Each of us now would

give his life to save the other's life. So has it been from that day until now, so will it be until we die."

Bor and Marash looked thoughtfully at Imer; Marash fixing his eyes on his and Bor going up close to him and looking up in his face.

"So," she said, "that is what it means to be blood-brothers."

"I understand," said Marash. "Trouble or good fortune coming to my father comes to you, too."

"Always," Imer said.

They walked on, climbing up now, a steep path. For a while no one spoke. Bor and Marash panted a little but the red-haired Imer seemed not a bit winded, rather he seemed better pleased than when the way was level.

"Are you mountain ponies, you two?" laughed Imer. "You sound like fat gentlemen from Skodra. Wait till you've climbed the mountains I have climbed—years of such trails, then you, too, will find breath enough extra for singing songs."

And suddenly he started in to sing. The children walked behind, near as they could to hear. They forgot the rough, steep path so interested they were to catch the words he sang. It was a tune they knew. The words were not familiar, and the story that they told neither Bor nor Marash had ever heard.

Sang Imer:

"What is this thunder borne on the wind?
Rugove and Ipek are fighting.
Adhem Isufi, brave as the air,
Has struck down three men in Nokshitch,
One by one the sons of Marku
Sons of Mark of the Black Mountains.
Swift as a hawk flies Rexh to aid,
Rexh Afdija, Afdij Smailij's son
He sups in Plava, dines in Gusinje,
So fast he travels to his aid.

"Miftar Aga went to help him,
In the kula of stone he was surrounded,
Like brave Muja gave he battle
Like brave Muja 'gainst Halili
In the swamplands they are fighting
And the swamp runs red.

"Sticks that float on swampy water
Messages to Austria
They shall float to far Tasligja
Bearing word to Austria's King
Saying, behold how Shqypenia treats her foes.

"Ali Pasha mounted horse
Sword he carried wrought from gold,

Off to Plava swift he rode
Sent he word to Mark Mulani.

“Thursday morning I shall start,
Thursday morning I shall go,
If you be in truth a man
Meet for battle in Valiti;
If you be in truth a hero
Meet me there with all my men;
If you be in truth a noble
Meet me there and face Shqypenia.

‘Slyly forth then went that Marku
Road he took across the streams,
Through spy-glasses saw the country,
Saw the brave men of Shqypenia.

Man of the black face, flee not from me
Before seven kingdoms you are disgraced,
Europe’s kingdoms see your downfall,
Mark Mulani, Mark Militsi,
I am not Tusi, nor Podgoritsa,
Nor am I Skodra in fancy dress,
I am Shqypenia bearing a sword.”

Imer ended his singing.

“Glory to your mouth,” cried Marash. “A splendid song!”

"Glory to your mouth," echoed Bor. "Thank you, thank you."

Imer looked back at them, smiling. "It is a song of my tribe," he told them.

The trail led down now.

"I know a song," said Marash. "You sing, too, Bor. Take the lines after me." Marash began to sing high and shrill, one line at a time. As he ended each line Bor sang it after him using a low-pitched tone such as she had heard the women use when they sang.

They sang:

"Guns blazed forth in the Pruu Valley
Castrati goes forth, gives alarm.
Hoti and Gruda rush to aid,
Hoti and Gruda of brave men risen.
Cannon of Dulcigne they are not,
But brave men of Trabajinit are they!
These are men that ask for right,
On rocks, under fig trees, blood is spilt.
Falls Gjiergj the son of Gjak,
Gjiergj is slain, cry for woe!
Vat Martini—where is he?
He lies beside Gjiergj Gjaku.

"Battalion by battalion come the troops,
With guns and bullets Hoti stops them.

On the level field the battle rages,
Led by Kol and Marash Vata.
Cannon's shot has killed brave Kola,
Like a swift hawk flies the shot,
Like a great flood life flows out—
Slain is Zef Lanula,
Zef Lanula—, cry for woe!

“Who is this boy seeking trouble?
Zef's son Kol breaks in the citadel,
The citadel he bursts, soldiers pour forth,
Run, cowards, danger is after you!
Who fought bravest at the hill's neck?
Kol Son-of-Zef-Son-of-Palit.”

The song was ended. Imer thanked them as they had him, “Glory to your mouths, children. That was fine singing. Where did you learn the song, Marash? That is not a song of your tribe.”

“It is a song they sing in Castrati,” answered Marash. “A Castrati man lived once for several days with us. Ndreka was his name. And every evening sitting by the fire he sang that song for us. When he left I knew it by heart.”

They walked a while in silence.

The trail led along a hillside close to a wood. Sud-

denly Imer stopped. The children caught up with him.

"Marash," asked Imer, "did your father ever tell you about this wood?"

Marash threw back his head, clicking his tongue for "no."

Bor said, "I know, they call it the 'Wood of the Oras.' What are oras, Imer? Are they jijapajumas or gargolis?"—Bor meant, are they fairies or giants?

"No, they are something different," said Imer. "Sit down here and we will rest and I will tell you about the Oras' Wood."

They all sat down on the ground facing the wooded side of the path.

"Listen," said Imer.

The wind sang through the trees.

"It's like voices," said Bor, "voices singing."

"Some people hear real voices in this wood," said Imer, "voices of oras, spirits of the wood." Then he pointed far across the valley to a wooded mountain opposite the one that they were on. "Over there is another wood like this one, and when these oras call, the ones across call back to answer them. They will tell each other things about the tribes, or things that are to happen to a man, good luck or bad.

If a man hears them he will often learn of things that no one knows, of future things, battles that shall be fought, troubles that come, or fortunate events."

"Have you ever heard them calling back and forth?" asked Marash.

"Not I," said Imer, "but a friend of mine, Ndoc was his name. was on this path one day and heard them."

"What did they say?" asked Bor.

"The oras here called, 'Ndoc, Son-of-Vat, is passing.' The oras over there called back, 'He travels to good fortune,' and these said, 'What fortune shall be his?' They said, 'A son is born to him.' And true it was, when Ndoc reached home he found a son was born."

"Couldn't he see the oras?" asked Marash.

"No, but sometimes they show themselves to men," Imer replied.

"What do they look like?" Bor asked eagerly.

"Sometimes," said Imer, "they look like children, in soft white floating dresses, and their feet make no sound on the trail, and sometimes the ora is a woman more beautiful a thousand times than any earthly woman. But they rarely speak. If a man sees one it stands silent and then turns and beckons him to follow."

"Why?" asked Marash.

"Oftentimes," said Imer, "an ora comes to lead a man to where a treasure is hidden."

"A treasure!" exclaimed Bor.

"Yes, gold and jewels, and coins of gold and silver, all sorts of precious things," Imer explained.

"Oras know all about such things."

"I wish they'd call out to each other now," said Bor.

"Likely enough," said Imer, "they don't like being so much talked about. Besides, we might hear evil things instead of good."

Imer got to his feet. "Come, children, I shall never get to Skodra if we sit wagging tongues this way." He led off down the path. Marash and Bor walked after him side by side.

"Marash," whispered Bor, "I would like to hear more about the treasures, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," Marash answered, "wait till the next cross is reached and Imer sits to smoke, then we will ask him."

Up and down hills they went, in single file now, Imer in the lead. Before long they saw at the top of a very steep bit of trail a wooden cross taller than themselves, stretching its arms wide as if waiting for them.

"Come, mountain legs," said Imer, "climb your best and at that cross we'll rest and I will smoke."

"Good—for us," said Bor softly.

"Yes," said Marash, "if he will only tell more. People like him, Mussulman, know more of magic than we do who have priests to teach us different things."

They reached the cross.

Imer sat down, drew out his silver holder for cigarettes, and taking paper and tobacco from his belt he rolled a cigarette. Like a little horn it was, bigger at one end. He stuck it into the long holder, then lit it and smoked, pressing the big amber bead at the holder's end against his lips.

Bor and Marash settled themselves one on each side of him. For a while no one spoke.

"Imer," said Bor at length, "did you ever know anyone the oras had shown treasure places to?"

"Yes, I had a cousin, and an ora came to him and led him by the hand to where there was a clear space in the wood, and all about he saw gold pieces lying—thousands of them. Then the ora left him and my cousin filled his belt. But he could not carry much that way and so he went back to the village where he lived to get a big rug to carry off a great deal of the gold. And he took back with him his brother and

his wife to the exact spot where he had seen the gold and——” Imer stopped, and shook off the ashes from his cigarette.

“Yes,” said Bor eagerly, “what then?”

Imer looked at her and then at Marash.

“When my cousin looked around to see the gold pieces nothing was to be seen but rubbish, leaves and sticks and stones.”

“Oh,” said Bor slowly.

Marash was still a minute, then he said, “Maybe the ora didn’t like his coming back to carry off so much.”

“Nothing at all but rubbish,” repeated Imer.

“Tell us some more,” said Bor.

Imer went on: “Another time—it was my wife’s own father told me this—it happened to himself—an ora came to him and led him to a place where he saw lying a man made all of gold. And with the handle of his pistol my wife’s father knocked hard at the gold fingers of one hand of the image, broke them off and took them in to Skodra. I saw the gold coins he had made from them. And then he looked about to find a man that he could trust to go with him and get the treasure, the gold image, for he could not move it by himself. He showed a friend of his the gold fingers before he had them melted up so

as to prove that what he'd seen was true. And then the friend and he went back——”

“It wasn't there!” cried Bor in a tone of distress, breaking in on Imer's story.

Imer threw back his head, clicking his tongue.

“There was no image there at all,” he said in a rueful voice.

“Nothing?” asked Marash.

“Only an old log,” said Imer, “lying just where my wife's father had seen the golden image.” Imer stopped and looked into the wide eyes of Bor and then at Marash. “And that was not all of that,” he went on. “Those two men fell into a deep sleep up there on the mountain and it was three days before ever they came back to their own village.” He thrust his cigarette holder back into his belt, stood up, shook himself. “Come, that is enough of oras.” He pointed down the trail. “See that far cross on the hill beyond, just where the trail winds up?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Marash.

“That is the limit of your tribe's land, Marash. To there you go with me, and after that cross I'll travel by myself and trust my rifle for my safety.”

“All right,” said Marash, “we will have two hours back to our house.”

They went on then.

As they neared the cross Imer had pointed out they saw three men sitting beside it, strangers.

They greeted them and took their greeting and good wishes in return.

"You go to Abate?" asked Marash.

"Yes, boy. What of it?"

"I and this girl here, Bor, we go that way, and we'd be glad to take the trail with you if you do not object," replied Marash.

The tallest stranger gave consent. "Good, you may travel with us. Once we reach Abate show us the house of Palok, Son-of-Ded."

"Indeed I will," said Marash. "That's my father."

The men looked at each other, smiled, and said, "Fortune is with us, Son-of-Palok."

They smoked with Imer. Then bidding him luck and a smooth trail they started off on the path he had come on.

Marash and Bor each took a hand of Imer's and touched it first to their lips and then to their foreheads. "Good-bye, Imer. May your feet find a smooth way."

"Good luck," he answered. "Good-bye to you. Long life, Bor. Long life to you, Marash," and down the trail he swung, bending his body back against the slope to balance better.

All the way back Bor and Marash thought much of what Imer had told and talked softly together of treasures and hiding places.

The three men came with them to Marash's house, ate supper with them, and sat by the fire singing songs. "They come from far away, I'm sure," said Marash in Bor's ear, "I never heard any of their songs before."

He and Bor lay down under a blanket in a far corner of the room. The men were singing still when both the children fell off to sleep.





CHAPTER XVII

SKANDER'S TREASURE

NIBBLING at cornbread by the fire the children sat next morning. The three guests went at dawn, their business with Palok finished.

Palok said to Marash, "So you took Imer safely to the boundary?"

"Po, bessa," said Marash. "Yes, on my word," he meant.

"We passed the Ora's Wood," said Bor to Palok.

"Oho," said Palok, smiling, "I will wager that Imer had a lot to say of that."

"He did," said Marash, "and he told us stories of finding treasures."

"Imer knows much of such things," Palok said. He lit a cigarette.

"One thing I'd like to know," said Marash, watching his father. "Who hides such treasures, for I've heard that men don't come on them so easily. They're often hidden in the earth itself. Why is it some people find them and others can't discover where they are?"

Palok thought a moment, puffing the strong tobacco in big clouds.

Bor went to where he sat and squatted down beside him. "Palok," she said, "do you know about such things, too? And must it always be an ora who comes to lead where treasures have been hidden?"

"Not always," answered Palok. "I don't know as much as Imer knows about the thing but I know how a treasure must be hidden so that it will lie safely in the ground until the one comes who has the right to find it."

"Tell us," Bor and Marash said together eagerly.

"It's this way," went on Palok. "If someone has a treasure to hide away for safe keeping he must go out with it, let no one see him go, and make quite

sure that no one follows him. Then he must find a far-off lonely place and choose the spot he'll hide the treasure in. Then—this is most important—he must find a guardian for it who will keep watch over it until the proper person comes to find it.”

“Who guards it?” said Marash.

“Well, when the man starts out he doesn't know just who will guard it, but as he is digging, or perhaps going down the path to the spot he's chosen, he sees a bird or animal, an insect even, and then he knows that that's the one who will be guardian for him. That animal or bird or insect watches the man hiding his treasure and the man makes the animal—suppose it is a bear—be guard by saying out a rhyme, special words, that gives the treasure to the keeping of the bear. It goes like this——” Palok stopped, hunting his memory for the forgotten words. Bor and Marash sat with eyes fixed on him and as quiet as two mice.

“I have it now,” Palok exclaimed, “the rhyme for treasure hiding goes like this:

“Bear, my treasure here I hide
Let it never be espied,
Guard it for me day and night,
Till he comes who has the right!”

"And then the bear guards it?" said Bor.

"As safe as safe," said Palok. "He has to after that."

"Then, when the right one comes?" questioned Marash.

"Then the bear leads the way to where the treasure is, or maybe if the right one seems to know where to look then the bear just watches, letting him find it for himself," said Palok.

"I see," said Bor.

"If the wrong man should come," said Marash, "would the bear stop his finding the treasure?"

"Of course he would," said Bor. Palok moved his head from side to side to mean "yes, yes."

Then he got up, leaving the two children by the fire.

"Bor," said Marash.

"Marash," said Bor.

"Let's hide a treasure ourselves," they said both at once.

Bor thought a minute, then her face lit up.

"We will hide it for Skander, my baby brother, to find when he is grown up," she cried softly.

"All right," Marash agreed. "Now what treasures have you got?"

"I know, I have them at my house," said Bor a bit mysteriously.

"I have some, too," said Marash. "You go home for yours, Bor, as fast as you can go, and I'll get mine together while you're gone. Then this afternoon we'll meet at the big rock near to the wooden bridge that spans the Lumi Shalit. Hurry, Bor, or it will be too late before you're back again."

And so the plan was settled.

As the sun set that afternoon Bor sat on the big rock by the bridge holding her precious things knotted in a kerchief in her hand.

"Would Marash come?" She watched the path. No one must see her here. And she and Marash must finish hiding their treasure before dark certainly. She waited with her heart thumping a bit harder as each moment went by.

Meanwhile Marash tied up his bits of treasure in an old piece of cloth. Then he took the trail at a trot toward Lumi Shalit.

"I hope Bor'll be there," he said to himself as his goatskin shoes went padding down the trail. "We haven't much time to find a hiding place and maybe we won't have an easy time finding a guardian for it."

He ran faster.

Then suddenly he saw the rock and Bor, and his feet flew. Panting he reached her.

"Good for you, Bor, have you passed anyone on the trail?"

"Only an old woman higher up the hill."

"She didn't notice that you carried things?"

"I hid it in my blouse," said Bor, "and you?"

"I passed no one. Come, let's go off into the woods."

They left the trail and went back up the hill from the water.

"It mustn't be too plain a spot," said Bor.

They searched about.

"Here's a good place," said Marash. He showed where a big rock lay underneath a tree.

Bor felt the earth. "It's not so hard," she said, "let's get flat stones to dig with."

Each found a stone and dug.

The hole showed dark earth first, then as they went down sandy earth and rocks.

They both worked hard in silence.

At last Marash said, touching with his hand the bottom of the hole, "We've dug clear to my elbow."

"That's far enough," said Bor. She laid down her digging stone.

Then she took up her little bundle of treasures lying beside her. Her voice shook a little with excite-

ment as she said, "We ought to put the things all in one cloth, Marash."

Marash spread out his cloth, his treasures on it. "Here's mine," he said, "look, Bor."

Bor, on her hands and knees, leaned over the cloth. "O—h, Marash!" she exclaimed, "they are real treasures."

On Marash's cloth was one gold coin. Bor picked it up, "It's gold," she said, wonder in her voice.

"It's Turkish gold," said Marash, "Imer gave it to me."

Bor fingered it, rubbing it on her sleeve to brighten it. "It's *lovely*, Marash." She studied the queer signs that marked it, then looked back to the cloth again, setting down the gold piece. "What is this, Marash?" she pointed to a little string of glittering beads.

"That's something Imer's wife gave my mother for me years ago when I was just a baby. See—it is a string of little beads with two tiny golden medals and a big blue bead at the end." He handed it to her. "It's really very precious, Bor, because my mother told me that tied to a baby's hair it acted like a charm and kept away the evil eye, bad luck, and things like that. It's magic, likely."

Bor laid it down again. "That's wonderful, for

Skander to have that hid in his treasure hole. He'll like it awfully."

"This thing," said Marash, "see, it's a knife blade. I found it on the trail going to school one day. When Skander gets this he can set it in a handle for himself."

"He'll like that, too," said Bor.

"This last," Marash picked up a little pasteboard box, "this is a thing a stranger from another country gave me. He spent the night with us one day last spring. It is a foreign thing—a sort of box, I guess. See how it closes. Both the ends tuck in." He tucked them in.

"Oh, that is beautiful," said Bor admiringly. She took it carefully and opened and closed each end. "That's fine, Marash, that is a treasure, too. Now look at mine."

She spread her kerchief out and picked up first and handed to Marash a silver coin.

"This coin Grandmother gave me to save until I'm grown. Well, she won't mind my giving it to Skander."

"It's different from my gold one," said Marash. "It has a picture on it, not Turkish writing signs. Look, it's a man's head and he has on a wreath of leaves."

"He is a king, an Austrian king," said Bor; "his money is the best there is in the bazaar, Grandmother says. It's hard, see, bite it." Marash bit the coin. "It's not just paper like the money the Italians give us."

They looked back to the kerchief.

"Now, this," said Bor, "this is a silver pin that Zarife's father made in the bazaar. See how it's twisted out of little wires—and in the middle my own name—'Bor.' See the three letters?—written with the wire? A silver name."

"That's splendid," said Marash. "When Skander finds that he will know without our telling him that you put this in for him."

"And this," said Bor, picking up a rusted screw and nut, "this is what you gave me last St. George's Day at the church in Iballje. Remember?"

"Yes," Marash took it in his hand lovingly. "This really is a treasure, Bor," he said. He screwed and unscrewed the nut. "This is the only thing I've ever seen like this. It came from far away, I'm sure."

"It must have," Bor agreed. "And look at this, Marash." She held up a piece of heavy silver chain, thick around as her own thumb. Shining it was and carved with strange designs.

"It's like the one your father wears," said Marash.

"It is a piece of his," Bor said. "One day he broke his chain and when he mended it kept out this piece for me."

Marash held it close to his eyes, looking at the markings on it. "It's heavy, Bor. Silver like that is not poor stuff, it's valuable." He laid it down.

"This is the last thing, Marash." She held out a metal spoon. Marash took it, wondering.

"It's not of wood at all," he said, surprised, "and yet I'm sure it is a kind of spoon. It's shaped like those we eat hot cornmeal with. It's very beautiful." He looked into the bowl. "Why, I can see my own face in this part of it," he exclaimed in more surprise.

Bor laughed. "Skander can use it for a mirror, then. Come, Marash, it is late. Put all your treasures in my kerchief and I'll tie it up tight."

Marash laid his things one by one with hers. Bor twisted and wound the kerchief ends in such a way that all the treasures were packed together in a lumpy bundle.

"Now, Bor," Marash spoke anxiously, "what have we seen that can be called as guardian of these precious things!"

"Oh, Marash, we've forgotten to keep watch of what went by. Is there no insect on the ground here, or an animal——"

Marash put back his head and looked up through the tree branches. He clutched Bor's arm excitedly.

"Look, look, Bor. There goes an orange hawk. He is the one. Hawks can see far—he sees us and our treasure and the hole we've made to hide it in. Quick, help me say the words."

Bor had the rhyme on the tip of her tongue and looking up at the hawk with its orange wings spread wide, circling over them, she cried:

"Hawk, my treasure here I hide
Let it never be espied,
Guard it for me day and night,
Till he comes who has the right."

She gasped, breathless a minute. "That means Skander, 'who has the right.'" Her eyes sparkled. "It's done, Marash. We have our guardian chosen, and our treasure's safe! He heard. He'll guard it. Quick, put it in the hole."

Marash set the kerchief of treasures in the hole. Then he took it out. He lifted the flat stones they had dug with and set them where the treasure was to lie. "That's better," he said, "it will keep the earth off them."

He laid the kerchief on the stones carefully. Then

he built a sort of stone covering over it, fitting the stones as well as he could.

Bor stood by, gazing in delight. "That's fine," she said, "I'm glad you thought of that."

Then she knelt beside him and together they pushed the earth back into the hole. Each drew a long breath as the last handful of dirt and stones was patted down. They sat back on their heels, looking at their work.

"It shows plain," said Bor, "just where we dug."

Marash jumped up. "I'll set a big stone over the whole spot." He went off and came back in a moment lugging a huge flat rock. Bor helped him set it over the mused earth of their hiding place.

"There!" she said.

"Good!" said Marash. He looked around them at the dim woods. "Hurry, Bor. We must not be found standing here like this. And dark is coming."

They made their way back to the trail and took the path to Marash's house.

Cornbread and salt for supper. "Bor will stay with us another night," said Zina, smiling at them over the fire.

"This is a kind house," Bor answered, "and I wish a blessing on it and on all of you."

As she and Marash lay that night in the corner

she thought to herself: "Skander is asleep at home to-night. He doesn't know that there is buried up on the mountain there a treasure just for him alone to find." She sighed happily.

Marash lying near was thinking, too.

"Bor," he whispered, "Bor, I hope none of those oras were watching when we——"

"They couldn't tell about it if they were," Bor whispered firmly back, "the hawk—he's guarding it."

"You're sure it's safe, Bor?"

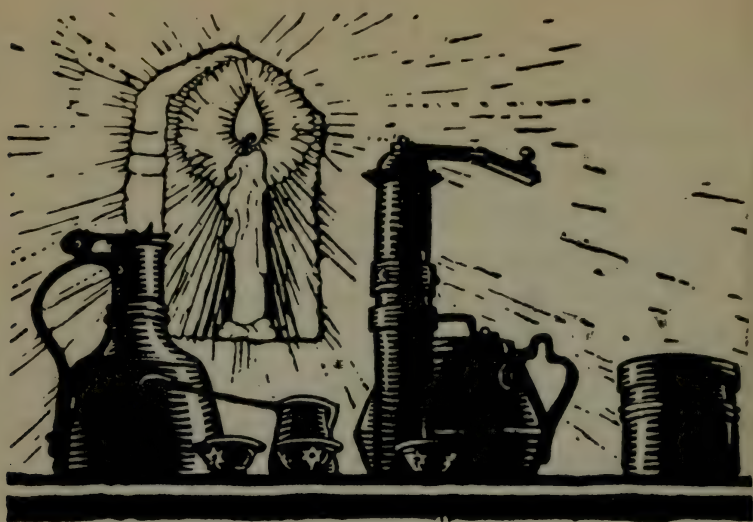
"Yes, I know it's safe. It's lying there—waiting for Skander."

Marash turned over, satisfied.

"Good-night, Bor."

"Good-night. Sleep a good sleep, Marash."

They slept.



CHAPTER XVIII

ST. MARK'S CANDLE

MARASH sat by the side of a tiny brook cross-legged on the ground, a heap of twigs beside him. From his belt he drew out his knife with its one sharp blade that folded between the two flat strips of horn riveted together. He opened it, felt its edge, then frowned. "Not sharp enough," he murmured, and bent to where a flattish rock lay in the earth near him. Carefully he drew the blade this way and that, feeling the edge now and then with his thumb. At length he sighed with satisfaction. "There's a real blade," he said aloud, and turned his attention to the pile of twigs.

"Straight they must be, not all nubbins and crooks—straight and strong." He found such a slim stick and, holding it tucked under one arm, slit the bark down and peeled, using knife and fingers.

Soon the twig was a smooth white stick. "Mir," said Marash which was his word for good. He laid the stick down and peeled another and another, selecting carefully each time and often throwing to one side a twig he found not suitable—crooked or too rough.

He worked with quick, strong hands and with an earnest face, puckered now and then into a frown with effort of his labor. After a time a pile of fine twigs—smooth, white, of different thicknesses, but straight, lay by his side. He got up, closed his knife, and slipped it in his belt. Then carrying his twigs under his arm, clutching them tight that none might slip out, he walked back to his house.

Inside his mother was sitting by the fire in front of a curved wooden frame of woven wicker, set slantwise in front of her. Tiny bobbins wound with black wool hung off it, and Marash saw her pick these bobbins up and cross and pass them from one side to the other. He'd seen this work before. Braid she was making, wide black braid for binding all the seams of all the clothing for the family. A strip of

woven braid hung down the frame and as she tossed the hanging spools back and forth more braid was woven and the strip grew long and longer.

For a second, standing by her side, Marash watched her work. Then she looked up and saw him.

"What do you want? Your eyes are asking something," Zina said.

Marash smiled. "Mother," he said, "I've all my twigs ready and peeled quite smooth. Now I must have thongs or strips of cloth for tying them together."

Zina left her bobbins hanging quiet a moment.

"Leather might do, unless," she thought a minute, "you can find strong strands of vine or tough strips of inner bark. Have you looked for either? They would hold your smooth twigs firm against each other and yet not show rough bunches where the sticks crossed."

"That will be best," agreed Marash. He laid the twigs by the hearth and went outdoors again.

He climbed up a gentle slope behind the house and then went across a grassy place to a tangled thicket. Here he cut with his knife long trailers of a tough vine and tearing these in strips had in a few minutes a dozen strong fibres.

Then he went back to the house and squatted by the fire, his peeled twigs beside him. Slowly and with great care he selected two twigs, one long and one short. The shorter one he cut still shorter and then held it against the long one not far from one end, making a long-stemmed cross. With a piece of the vine he bound these two together, winding and crossing the bindings until they held firmly.

"Look, Mother." He held the cross up for her to see.

Zina nodded approvingly. "Mir," she said. "A well-made cross should get a good blessing at the church to-morrow."

Marash smiled, pleased with his work, and laying the finished cross to one side he took up two more sticks and cut and tied them as before.

For a long time he sat there making crosses of the peeled twigs.

"Some are longer than others," he said.

"But they are all crosses," said Zina, "and after the priest has sprinkled them with holy water we will fasten them to the walls for blessing and good fortune and each will be as holy as the other."

"There will be one for the door," said Marash, "and one for this room and for the room downstairs, and one for Cousin Nush's house and one to

fasten in the corner where I sleep myself." He twisted busily, trying the cross piece every time to see if it was firm.

"Crosses for St. Mark's Feast," said Zina. "To-morrow you will go with Palok and Lul and me to the church in Thethi, and the priest there will be dressed in red and gold with candles burning on the altar table and he will make prayers and sprinkle the blessed water on these smooth twigs you've worked on with such care."

Marash finished the last cross and raised his eyes, looking at Zina as she threw the bobbins from side to side working at her braid.

"To-night, then, Mother, is St. Mark's Eve," he said.

"Yes," answered Zina, "and Palok will probably bring guests with him to eat and spend the night with us and then to-morrow go with us to church."

"Last year," said Marash, "on St. Mark's Eve Father made a candle for St. Mark. Remember, Mother?"

"Of course, one always makes a candle for the Saint. A candle is a long prayer, Marash, and as it burns it is as if one prayed until the candle is burned out."

Marash looked into the fire, and then at Zina.

"Mother," he said, "I know how to make such a candle."

"Perhaps you do," Zina bent near her frame to straighten out a tangle in the threads.

"Mother," said Marash, "I wish——"

Zina went on working silently.

Marash gathered up the crosses and bound the long stems of them together with a last wrapping so that they made a long bundle. He carried them to the corner where he slept and laid them against the wall. Then he came back to the fire and stood beside his mother.

"Mother," he said earnestly, "do you think Palok would let me make the candle for St. Mark to-night?"

Zina looked up. "So young a boy as you are, Marash—it is not usual."

"Father might be willing," said Marash, "I am his oldest son, his only son. And I would try to make as good a candle as Palok himself. I know the way."

"Well," Zina went back to braiding, "ask him, then. It may be he will think you old enough."

She worked while Marash watched. Then getting up she wound the braid into a ball at the back of the frame and carried it bobbins and all to the side of the room where she hung it on a peg in the stone wall.

"Time soon for evening bread," she said to Ma-

rash and went to a sort of table shelf where she had meal and water ready for mixing.

Lul, the little sister, had been all this time asleep under the shelf. Now she heard her mother and woke up and toddled out to sit beside Marash. Marash took a little piece of the black thread his mother had been using and had left there and tying the ends together he began to twist them on his hands. "See, Lul," he said, holding his hands so she could see, "watch what I'll make for you." Lul understood and laughed up at him, reaching to catch the thread. But Marash raised his hands out of her reach. Then moving his fingers so that here and there he caught the strands of thread he crossed and wove them, then held them out stretched tight. They made a pattern of crossed lines. "That is the donkey's saddle, Lul," he said. He crossed the threads again by moving and picking at them with his fingers, stretched them again, the shape was changed again. "Now the string makes your cradle, see," he said. And Lul laughed again, looking at the net of threads, and made sounds that she thought were words, just baby sounds. Marash tried for a new shape but the thread broke suddenly. Lul slapped her two hands on his and gave a little cry of pleasure. Marash gave her the thread to play with.

Sounds struck his ears. He listened. He heard steps outside, low voices. Then the door opened down below and Palok with two men and a woman came up the stone stairs.

Greetings were exchanged between them all and Zina, who left her bread and came to take the woman's hand and lay her cheek to hers. The men were tall like Palok and blue-eyed. Their names were Ndue and Vat. They hung their rifles beside Palok's rifle by the door.

Lul ran off to her mother, held to her skirt and hid her face, then peeked to see the strangers.

Marash moved back away from the hearth that there might be more room for all the guests.

The tallest man, named Ndue, looked at Marash, turned then to Palok. "Your son, Palok?" he said. Marash stood up.

Palok moved his head sideways, meaning a "yes" to Ndue.

Ndue put a hand on Marash's shoulder and Marash looked up at him.

"A big boy, Palok," Ndue said, smiling at Marash. "Nearly big enough to bear a rifle for himself. Hail to you, Palok's son, greetings and long life!"

"Long life to you!" Marash replied, standing as straight as he could and feeling taller than he ever

had before. He liked the look in Ndue's blue eyes. He liked this special greeting for himself.

Palok and his guests seated themselves by the fire and Zina put her bread to bake in the hot ashes. Lul sat near by nibbling a piece of goat's cheese. Marash stood across the fire from the men thinking new thoughts.

Ndue had called him "big." He was growing up then, looking like a tall boy, no longer like a child too young to know things and to understand. What was it Ndue had said? "Big enough to bear a rifle for himself." Yes, that was it. A gun, that he would carry on his back as Ndue and Vat and Palok carried theirs. That would mean he was a man like them. He'd take the trails alone and recognize all the friends and all the enemies of his own tribe. He'd know what men to trust as Palok did and what men had "black faces," evil hearts.

He sat down farther from the fire than the rest and watched them. Work he would do with Palok in the fields that were his father's cornlands, and he'd bargain in Skodra with the shopkeepers, talk with the other men, and hear the news of border fighting, entertain his guests, make coffee at the fire. "Nearly big enough" had been the words. Perhaps to-night—

Palok was grinding coffee even now in the brass grinder, one hand on the knobbed handle turning, the other holding tight the shining cylinder.

A shot rang out.

Palok laid down the grinder, stepped to the stairs, lifting his gun off the peg it hung on.

Marash knew his father being host, head of the house, had in his hands the fortunes of his guests. If there was danger for them it must be danger to Palok since they were sheltered in his house tonight. So Palok with his rifle in his hand went outside, closing the lower door behind him.

Marash saw the coffee grinder lying where Palok had left it. It was the host's duty, making coffee for the guests. Women baked bread and boiled the meat, but it was the man of the house who made the coffee. Palok was gone, his guests had not yet had the taste of hospitality.

Marash went to the fire, sat down cross-legged. He took the brass grinder, turned as Palok had. Zina came to the fire with a black iron pot filled with water and the cut-up meat she had prepared. She hung it on a hook dangling from the ceiling of the room over the flames. The two men and the woman sat and talked. One man took out his flat tobacco box and rolled a cigarette. Then the other man, Vat it

was, turned himself back to the fire to take off his wet opanga and his woolen shputa and socks. No one of them seemed to think it at all strange of Marash to step in this way to fill his father's place when he was gone.

Marash ground. The handle turned hard, but his hands were strong enough for this. Ndue had called him big. Now Ndue would understand that he could grind and make the coffee for the guests, even as Palok. Then the handle turned easily and Marash knew the coffee beans had all gone over the edge of the metal wheel into the lower section of the grinder. He unscrewed the bottom part and saw the fine brown powder ready for the making.

He looked toward the stairs. No sound outside. Just then Zina leaned and set in front of Marash the coffee things, the little can of sugar and a small wooden spoon, the small saucepan with its slim handle, long so that it would not be too hot to touch. Then three cups like little bowls Zina set down close to the hearth. Marash saw the copper jar of hot water Palok had left against the fire. Everything ready.

Marash took the spoon, filled it three times with the powdered coffee from his grinder and three times with the sugar, mixing these six spoonfuls all together in the saucepan, "jasme" he called it to him-

self. Then from the copper pitcher he poured hot water till the jasme was nearly full, and then he set the jasme in the red-hot coals just at the fire's edge. All this he had seen Palok do a hundred times and more.

Vat who had got off his shoes and socks now stood and hung them near the ceiling over the heat and turned back barefoot to the hearth. Ndue took his long silver holder from his belt and set in it his new-rolled cigarette, lit it and drew the smoke in slowly. The woman, Drania, they called her, joked with Ndue. Zina was busy near the table shelf getting food ready. Lul, a bit of cornbread in her hand, had fallen fast asleep behind Marash. There was no sound outside.

Marash watched his little pot of coffee. If Palok came he'd find his son had carried well the duties of a host. If he were late in coming still his guests should have what properly was owed them.

The coffee looked all foamy on the top. Marash never took his eyes away. Now was the time when coffee could be spoiled unless you watched carefully. A second or two and it would boil up and if he left it half a second longer it would boil over and be lost. Clumsiness like that would make them know he was too young for playing host. The foamy liquid bulged

now on one side. Marash took hold of the handle, ready. With a little purring sound the bulging side broke into bubbles. *Now*—Marash drew the jasje back from the heat. The bubbles and the foam just on the very edge of overflowing died down. Coffee was made. He poured it out into the cups. Just enough for three. Gravely he lifted one and with one hand pressed to his breast he stood and reached the coffee cup to Ndue. "Per t'mir," he said. "For good," the words meant. "Thank you," said Ndue, and took the little cup. And Marash answered as the answer was for such a time, "May you find good luck!"

Each cup he handed so, with just these words. Vat's first and then the woman's, this was custom.

The three guests sipped slowly. Ndue looked at Marash over his cup's edge, sipped again, then said, "You make good coffee, Son-of-Palok, again long life!"

Marash's eyes met his. "Long life to you," he answered, satisfied.

Palok came in and hung up his gun again.

"Forgive me, friends, I've kept you waiting too long for your coffee." He saw that they were drinking. "Coffee is made?" he asked, then saw Marash putting the cover on the sugar box. "Good, I've a son," said Palok.

The three cups were empty now. Marash rinsed them in the warm water, pouring it from one into the other and emptying the last one on the hearth. Steam rose where the water fell soaking into the earth.

Palok sat down by Ndue.

"Grind more, Marash, and mix a cup for me and for yourself."

Marash's heart gave a happy little thump. So Palok did think him big enough to act as host. And big enough to take a cup of coffee for himself just like a man. He ground and mixed again—two cups this time, and gave one to his father, saying again the words that must be said with coffee drinking.

Never before had Marash sat at coffee with the men, always he'd watched them drink, and he, a child, sat at the side, unnoticed. Now he sipped with Palok, tasting the sweet strong mixture on his tongue. The cups were emptied, rinsed, and Marash carried off the coffee things.

Now Zina brought the low table and served the cheese, laying the wet white pieces in a wooden bowl. Palok poured "rakia," a mountain drink that went before the food. After this Zina brought cornbread, and then she took the bubbling iron pot of meat down from the hook above the fire. The steaming

meat she served piled in a bowl. When it was cool each guest would help himself.

Only the three guests ate; Palok and Marash sat across the fire from them.

Ndue said, "You were gone long, Palok."

Palok slowly rolled a cigarette. "I went down to the lower trail," he said. Small iron tongs lay near the hearth and Palok picked them up. Leaning to the fire he found a red-hot coal and raised it in the tongs up to his cigarette and lighted it. He smoked a moment, silent. Then he said, "No sign of danger—no one on the trail. A signal shot perhaps."

The others lifted up the bits of meat and ate.

Palok looked at Marash. "Marash," he said, "there is hardly light enough for men to eat—not light enough for feasting a man's guests. Get light for us, please."

Marash went to where a tiny pile of pitch pine was heaped against the wall. He drew his knife and whittled off a piece long as his hand and thick as a man's finger, then another one, and tucked this in his belt.

The first piece he carried to the fire and held the smaller end of it in the low flame. It caught and flamed at once, for this pine wood was full of resin

that took fire like oil. Marash moved, holding the splinter like a little torch, to where the guests were seated by the table. Standing behind them he held the burning piece at about shoulder height. The flame burned deep orange and gave off black murky smoke that smelled strong of the pine sap. Marash liked the smell.

"Good," said his father, "hold the light there, as you have it now."

Marash stood. The stick burned like a tiny lamp, making light that side of the room, light on the guests eating. Marash rested his weight on one foot, standing at ease. He knew it would be long before the meal was done. But he knew how to stand still without getting tired. His arm might ache a little, but what of that? He was big enough to stand a little ache. He had made coffee, now it was his part to furnish light. The pitch-pine candle hardly moved, he stood so still. The smoky flame would flicker of itself, but Marash held his body still as any tree, his hand upraised, unmoving.

Time passed. The men and Drania ate slowly. After a long time the meat was finished. Zina brought to the table bits of fat pork. Slowly they ate that, talking with Palok and calling to Zina, "Glory

to your hands," praise for her cooking. Zina smiled and always brought more to them, lean pork, and then eggs mixed over the fire in a shallow pan.

Marash changed his weight to the other foot; noticed the stick he held was burning away. He drew the other piece out of his belt and lit it from the first, then tossed the burnt-out stick into the fire. All the time he held the second light high as he had the first so that no one knew he'd made the change.

Now his arm felt stiff, aching a little. Still he stood motionless and watched the shadows on the far side of the room move as the light flared this way and that.

He stood.

Now he saw Zina serving wild honey to the guests. They dipped it up with bread. After a while they finished, thanking their hostess for the fine meal they had had. Marash saw Zina take away the table and carry it to where her husband sat. She brought cornbread.

"Marash," said Palok quietly.

Marash crouched to put his torch out with his foot and laid it on the pile of pitch pine by the wall. He went to where his father was. Palok motioned him to sit and eat.

Marash was glad to squat down by the table.

His legs that he had held so still wanted to bend. He sat cross-legged, resting, tired all at once. The arm that had been raised to hold the torch he stretched out straight, and then, unwilling that his father should know how stiff it was, he paid it no more attention, but began his meal as Palok did.

He ate, and while he ate thought about St. Mark's candle and wondered when it would be made that night, and again he longed to be the one to make it.

Zina brought them what the guests had left of meat and eggs. They, too, were careful not to eat it all but left a share for her, and for the big sister Pren.

The meal was over. Cigarettes were lit. Palok's flat metal box that held "duhan," as Marash called tobacco, was empty this time.

Marash saw. Here was more work for him.

He went to a far corner and brought back to the fire a great bundle of dried tobacco leaves, pressed tight together in a solid cake. Then he got a cutter made of wood with a sharp blade fitted so that with one hand it could be pressed downward to cut. He set the bundle of tobacco leaves against the knife, just near enough so that when the blade cut the merest shaving would come off.

He put the cutter on the floor and knelt beside

it, holding the leaves in place. He brought down the knife. "Clop" it sounded at the end of the stroke and shavings of tobacco like fine yellow hair fell off. "Clop" went the knife again, and more of the soft light fibers fell. Marash worked on. "Clop," "clop," and with each cut the pile of gold-brown hairs grew bigger.

He gathered it up in his two hands and carried it to Palok.

"Thank you, Marash," and Palok filled his box, then rolled a cigarette for Ndue, another one for Vat, last, one for himself.

"This comes from Skodra, this 'duhan,'" said he. "Cut more, Marash, and fill the boxes of our guests."

And Marash shaved off layer after layer and carried to Ndue and Vat a handful each to fill their boxes.

"To-morrow is the great day of St. Mark," said Ndue, "it is good luck for us to go with you to Thethi to church."

"Yes," said Zina, who now sat beside Drania near the hearth. "This afternoon Marash made his crosses for the blessing of the priest."

"There's wax here," said Palok, "blessed by the priest in Plani. One of us shall make a candle for St. Mark."

Marash heard. He was sitting now close to Palok. He put his hand out and laid it on his father's knee.

"Father," he said, "I'll make the candle for St. Mark."

Palok's eyes rested on him a minute. It seemed to Marash that they showed a faint surprise, then it faded and instead a proud look came into them. Marash stood up.

Then Palok gave consent. "Good, make it, Marash."

Marash went to the wall. In a hollow place in the stones he found a little cake of the holy wax. Beeswax it was, and greenish. Marash made the sign of the cross and pressed the wax to his lips and to his forehead, saying under his breath a prayer that he had heard Palok say.

Then he found near where his mother's weaving things were set a piece of woolen cloth, just a thin strip as long as his longest finger. This was for the wick.

He sat down by the fire, Ndue made room for him. The wax warmed and softened in the heat and Marash rolled it between his palms, making it still softer. He patted it out flat. Then on the flat cake he laid the woolen strip and rolled the wax around

it. At one end of the roll the wool stuck out already like a wick. Now he must make the candle smooth and long, well-shaped. He worked hard, pressing and rolling, making sure the wick kept in the center of the wax cylinder.

When it was done to suit him he crossed himself again and made a prayer as he had seen his father do last year.

Then he stood up and all the others with him, Zina, Pren, and Drania, Palok and Ndue and Vat. Marash handed the candle to his father. He knew that Palok as the head of the house must be the one to light it. Palok took from the fire a little stick that flamed at one end. He held the candle wick against the flame. Marash watched, breathless. Would it light? Had he made a good candle, after all? A candle well made should light easily. It spluttered. Would it light? Splutter, wax melted, the wick caught. Marash breathed a sigh of relief. The little flame grew stronger, then blazed steadily as Palok held the candle upright before him.

Now everyone prayed, crossing themselves, bowing their heads a little. Marash did the same. The voices made a soft murmuring in the room. This was a prayer meant for St. Mark himself to hear. Marash

knew that. He murmured with the rest. The prayer was done.

Palok gave the lighted candle to Marash. Marash knew what to do now. He went to where the wax had been before, that hollow place between the stones of the wall as if a stone had been left out to make a little shelf.

Marash tipped the candle up and let the drops of hot wax fall on the lower stone. Then he set the end of the candle in the little pool the drops had made and the wax hardened, holding the candle firm and upright in the niche. It stood there burning with a pointed steady light without smoke, "like a star," thought Marash.

All the rest sat down beside the fire, and Marash seated himself between his father and the man Ndue, but back a little that they might have room. He felt warm all through, and peaceful, satisfied as he had never felt before.

To-night had brought this peace—St. Mark's Eve. There had not ever been a night like this for him.

For this night he had not just watched the men, sitting as children do beside the hearth, listening to the talking and the songs. No, he had had part himself, had been a part of this night's doings.

He had made coffee in his father's place, and the guests had made acknowledgment to him. He had held the pitch-pine splinter to make light for them, standing still as a tree a long, long time that they might feast in comfort as befitted hospitality in Palok's house.

And then he had prepared tobacco for them, shaving the fine Skodran tobacco leaves as thin as any cutter in the bazaar could do.

Then last and best of all he'd made St. Mark's candle for Palok to light, and he had set it in the niche to burn in prayer for hours to the Saint.

Ndue said to Palok, looking at Marash, "You have a man here, a good son to you, Palok. A year or two will see him with his rifle on his back like any man of us."

His father turned to Marash and Marash saw his eyes were serious. The look in them made Marash feel not like a child at all, but older somehow, equal to Palok, whom he loved so much and so admired.

Palok answered Ndue, looking still into the eyes of his son as if he meant the words for him, "It is not the gun he carries on his back that makes a man, it is the heart he carries in his breast."

Marash's eyes turned to the stone niche in the wall.

There stood the candle he had fashioned of the holy wax with his own hands and set to burn in prayer for all of them, for the three guests, for Zina, Pren, and Lul, and Palok, yes, and even for himself, Marash, who soon would be a man, the grown son in his father's house who then would know the duties of a man, comfort and safety of a guest, stranger, or friend, protector of his home, and guardian of the honor of his tribe and family. As Ndue had said, he soon would bear a rifle, but a rifle by itself was just a gun to shoot with. To carry it was not so great a thing, as Palok had told Ndue, unless a man should carry in his breast the brave heart of a mountaineer. That counted more—Marash could understand.

The men were unwinding their long girdles, getting ready for the night. Soon they would lie, feet to the fire, sleeping. "To-night," thought Marash, "I will not go to my corner but I will lie here with the men."

He unwound his belt and took off socks and moccasins as all had done. Zina went to her sleeping place and carried with her the sleeping baby Lul. Pren, who had been knitting in a corner, followed her. The men smoked a last cigarette and then good-night was said in low tones as suited the late hour

and the dark. Marash lay down near Palok and Ndue. Sleepy, he felt.

St. Mark's Eve was over. To-morrow he would take his crosses to the church. He raised himself on one elbow and looked toward the stone niche. The candle burned there like a little star.





CHAPTER XIX

MARASH CLIMBS THE RED MOUNTAIN

“Geese I bought
Three black, three white.
At Haslik’s house
I passed the night.
A spotted dog
Came after me.
A stick I took
And gave him three—
One—two—three.”

sang Marash as he took the sheep path across the plain east of Skodra. As he sang the last words he

slapped at an imaginary dog with the stick he carried.

Then he sang the song again, and stopped, standing stock still, his back to Skodra, his face to the Kiri and the mountains beyond.

The piping of a shepherd came to his ears. He listened, swept the plain with his eyes. Oh, there he was, the shepherd, sitting in the sparse grass far ahead of Marash, an umbrella over his head to keep off the sun, and the thin pipe like a long whistle held to his mouth. His sheep grazed near.

Marash felt the burning heat of the sun, and the shade of the old umbrella looked cool and restful. He turned his steps toward the shepherd. As he went up to him he noticed that the shepherd was a very young man, with fine dark eyes and hair and a handsome lively face.

"Long life to you," Marash greeted him; "God grant you a good increase of your flock!"

"Long life to you, Shala, where are you bound for?" answered the shepherd, showing his white teeth in a smile.

"To the mountains," answered Marash, "but the shadow of your umbrella calls to me on this hot day."

The man made a motion of his hand to Marash,

beckoning him nearer. "Come, share it, then," he said, "no trail is too long for resting on the way."

Marash seated himself beside the shepherd who shifted his umbrella a little to cast a shadow on Marash.

"You play pleasant tunes," said Marash, "I, too, made myself a pipe when I herded goats in the mountains."

"Play for me, if it pleases you," said the man, and handed his pipe to Marash.

Marash fingered the holes, five there were. He set the hollow stem to his lips. Then he blew, moving his fingers to cover or uncover the five holes so that the notes changed as he piped and a little tune came out.

"Glory to your mouth," said the shepherd, thanking him. "You play as a shepherd. My own tune is different," and he played again the notes Marash had heard at first.

"It is a pretty tune," said Marash, "thank you. I praise the skill that made so fine a pipe."

They sat silent a while, then the shepherd drew out of his loose white blouse cornbread and goat's cheese.

"Eat with me, mountaineer," he invited Marash, offering him the food.

"Thank you," said Marash, taking a piece of bread and a piece of the cheese. "Good appetite!"

"Good appetite!" answered the shepherd.

"My empty stomach is glad of your hospitality," said Marash, "for I have not eaten since early this morning in the bazaar."

"You are going alone on the trail?" asked the shepherd.

"Perhaps," said Marash, "though if I wait a bit friends are bound to come by here on their way from Skodra, friends or people of my tribe."

"Wait then with me. Beiram is my name, son of Sheqir, of Drishti."

"Good," answered Marash; "while the sun is hot I will be glad to sit and talk with you. But as I came over the plain, just as I heard your piping, there came into my head a plan."

"And what was that?" asked Beiram.

Marash pointed across the Kiri above the Mezi Bridge to a high rocky mountain. "I had in mind," he said, "not to go home to-night. Instead to go off up there on that reddish mountain, to the very top."

"There is no village that way," said Beiram.

"I know," said Marash, "but I would not climb to reach a village. I would climb to reach the top of

it and to look down on all the land below and all the villages."

"Night would come on you," Beiram said, "and you would have no roof above you, no, nor evening bread."

"Bread I can take," said Marash, "and there would be the sky for roof."

"Bears there are up there," said Beiram, his brown eyes opening wide in warning as he spoke.

"Bears could not go as fast over those rocks as I," said Marash, smiling.

"Thunder often roars there," said Beiram, "and lightning leaps from rock to rock dangerously."

"Thunder is noise," said Marash, and he said the word they used for "thunder"—"bumbullim." "And lightning travels on the air and can strike here as well as on that mountain top."

"You've a brave heart, Shala." Beiram shook his head. He raised his eyes to Marash curiously. "Tell me, mountaineer, why is it in your head to climb a mountain where no village is at all, nor anything but rocks and sky and rocks?"

Marash threw back his head and gave a little laugh.

"You will not understand, you Son-of-Drishti. You live too close to Skodra plain, these flat lands and

the river and the lake. You do not know what it is like to have a pair of mountain legs that itch to climb and love the going up and coming down more than good level walking."

"No, my legs like more this sitting in the field or following the wandering paths worn by the sheep," said Beiram. "But," he went on, "your legs would get enough of mountain trails taking the path to Shala. There's something else that makes you want to go chasing a cloud on top of that high mountain. What is it, Son-of-Shala?"

Marash looked at his new friend seriously.

"This reason, too, will seem unnatural to you, herder of sheep."

"What's that?" said Beiram, his keen brown eyes fixed on Marash's blue ones.

"You know what school is, Beiram?"

"I have heard," said Beiram, "and in Skodra once I saw boys marching by in long black robes tied with red cords, and when I asked, a man told me they were school boys that the Jesuits were teaching to be priests."

"Well," said Marash, "in Thethi near to where I live in Shala there was a school something like that but not for making priests. Instead they taught

us how to read and write and make signs that meant numbers on our slates. And oftentimes we counted up the sheep in flocks belonging to different houses, and then we put all the numbers down on our slates and added them together, and that way we found out how many sheep there were in the whole village—things like that.”

Beiram showed interest now. “And writing—what was that like?”

“We wrote letters, a, b, c, d, and sounds like that and words made out of such sounds. After we knew the sounds we could write down anything we thought, stories, messages to people far off.”

“That would be useful, too,” said Beiram thoughtfully. “And reading—tell me what school reading was.”

“You’ve seen the men in Skodra’s coffee garden reading the newspapers, haven’t you?” asked Marash.

“Yes,” answered Beiram, “but I never rightly understood what they were doing with those black-spotted sheets.”

“They understood the words that were written there, and those words told them all about the world—all about Italy, and Serbia, and Montenegro, and

the seven great nations of Europe, and about that far-away place people call America," explained Marash.

"Hm," said Beiram, puzzled to understand this sort of thing. "And did you read newspapers, too, at school?"

"We had some books," said Marash, "books at first easy to read; after, other ones harder and more interesting. The Friar lent me last year some books that he had got from Skodra and some books written in our Shqyp tongue and printed in Austria."

"And what did they tell about?" asked Beiram.

"That's just it," said Marash, "they told about so much, about so many things—things that you and I have never seen—about far lands and people different from ourselves, who do not live as we live. When I read all those books it made me feel unpeaceful here," he touched his chest with one hand. "It made me want to go traveling far away to see what all the world beyond Shqypenia was like. And now to-day I felt that restlessness so strong inside me that I said to myself, 'I'll climb that Red Mountain where no village is, where people do not go, and I'll go up and reach the very top of it, and looking around me from so high a place maybe I shall see as far as to the edge of Shqypenia—beyond, per-

haps, into that strange world different from our own." Marash stopped talking suddenly. "I told you, Drishti, that you would not understand, but—" his face flushed red with earnestness and he went on—"but you *would*, Beiram, you *would*, if you had read the things I read about."

Beiram's brown eyes were puzzled but his mouth smiled understandingly.

"So, that's your reason for the climb, and that's the thing has put such courage in you, that roofless, supperless, and fireless perhaps you want to spend a night up there with lightning storms, and savage bears and wolves."

"Yes," answered Marash in a steady voice, his eyes fixed on the mountain rising at the far edge of the plain beyond the Kiri.

Beiram sighed. "I do not read or write," he said regretfully, "but my heart is beside your heart in this, and I can wish you from my heart good luck on this wild journey, and go on a smooth trail, Son-of-Shala. What do they call you, mountaineer?"

"Marash, Son-of-Palok," said Marash. "Thank you, Beiram, Son-of-Sheqir, for your good wishes." He looked toward the sun that sank a little now from its noon height.

"Time I was gone," he said. "Your bread and

your umbrella and your friendliness have made me forget how fast the sun moves to the west. It will be three hours or more to the top of the Red Mountain."

"Here," said Beiram, "here is bread for you to eat to-night and a pomegranate I was keeping to take home with me. There will be juice enough in that to keep off thirst if water should be scarce among those rocks." He put into Marash's hands what was left of the bread and a hard red fruit bigger than Marash's fist.

"Thank you," said Marash, "and good luck to you, Beiram." He stood up, tucked the food into his belt.

"Go on a smooth trail, Marash," Beiram said, and stood beside him.

Marash started off.

"Peace to you," he called back.

His rawhide moccasins brushed the dry grass and the prickly cactus-like plants growing here and there. As he neared the river the ground was covered with rough brown ferns that reached up to his knees as he walked through them. He reached the Kiri well above the bridge.

The water this summer season was shallow and the stream flowed wanderingly in the wide gravel bed.

Marash walked out on the pebbly flats. He took off

his moccasins and socks and put them in his belt, and rolled his tight trousers back from the ankle halfway up his shins. Then he waded into the water. It was slow-moving, shallow water near the edge, but as he got farther out it grew deeper and the current was stronger. The water rose in little high-crested ripples where it flowed against his legs. Once it reached to his knees. It was hard to keep his footing on the small loose stones underneath.

"The river pushes me," said Marash to himself, "but I can push as hard," and he strove against it, making his way into the shallower part at the far side. Once out on the other bank he leaned and drank from his cupped hands. He put on socks and moccasins again and rolled down his trousers over his wet legs. Then he crossed another gravel flat and climbed up out of the river bed. He turned his face toward the rocky flank of the Red Mountain.

The way led through less rocky country for a bit, and here on a warm hillside a fig tree had taken root and now spread its wide branches and broad leaves to the sun. Marash saw among the boughs the green round balls, the figs—purple some of them where the sun had ripened them more. The branches grew fairly low on the trunk and Marash managed, standing on a rock, to reach a low one. He scrambled up into

the tree and sat swinging his legs and looking around him. Figs would make good eating on this trip of his. With these and what food Beiram had given him he could manage finely on the mountain top for supper and for breakfast there to-morrow. After that he'd find the trail toward home and there would be friends or relatives along the way who would have food to share with him.

He searched among the green-purple fruit to find the ripest. He picked one purpler than the rest and broke the soft thick skin. It was soft inside, a mass of tiny seeds with a red juicy jelly holding them together. He bit into the mass, turning the skin inside out as he ate to get all of the fruit.

Satisfied now that the figs were ripe enough to carry with him he climbed about in the branches picking a purplish fig now here, now there. At length he had eight good ones. He put them inside his blouse, four on each side.

Now he let himself down to the ground by hanging with his hands from a low branch. Once on solid earth he unwound his girdle and wound it on again more loosely. Then he tucked his store of fruit and bread carefully in the folds so that he could not lose it on the climb and so that the weight of it would not bother him as he went along.

Then he began his journey in earnest, climbing the slope at the mountain's foot. This slope was covered with rocks of different sizes, good fun to clamber over. As he climbed he glanced toward the top to make sure that he kept the right direction. The slope grew steeper and a ridge of jutting rock above him hid the mountain top from his sight. Up he went.

Here were no trails, nor any sign that men ever went this way. There was sometimes a spot of earth with grass dried brown. Marash turned and saw below him the cobbled narrow road leading by Drishti. On it he could see here and there a man or woman or a group of people going home from the bazaar at Skodra carrying goods and purchases on back or shoulders. From where he stood they all seemed small, and he knew that soon, as he climbed higher up, they would be moving dots on a faint path.

Now for a while the way was easier going, more earth and grass and a rocky track—the dry bed of a stream. This Marash followed as if it were a path. It led him up a winding way but always up.

He climbed a long time, singing as he went, a song Imer had taught him. The sun was not so hot now on his back but the dry air had dried out thoroughly his wet trouser legs.

He reached a big rock by the side of the stream's

track and turned to look down on Skodra. Now he could see the plain where he and Beiram had sat that morning and then beyond, the minarets and steeples of Skodra itself.

He climbed some more. Now he could see past Skodra to the Lake, lying a huge silver sheet of water in the westering sun. Across the Lake stood Mount Tarabosh and the long wall of mountains stretching around the shore. Higher he went. The mountains on the far side of the Lake seemed to sink lower and he saw plainly the winding ribbon of the Boyana River that led from Skodra Lake into the sea.

Nearer and to his left the Drin wandered, flowing under the low wooden bridge that Marash had once crossed in going south to the town of Llesh.

His stream-bed trail led to a wider one where water trickled. Marash leaned and drank, putting his face and mouth into the tiny stream. "Likely enough," he told himself, "this is the last water I shall see on this journey. Better take enough to keep from being thirsty too soon." He drank more than he wanted.

Now the ground above him lay strewn with pinkish colored rocks and the mountain top he could not see, only odd-shaped knobs of reddish rock that thrust themselves in unfamiliar form against the sky.

He climbed.

As he went up, the rocks were larger. Sometimes right in front of him would rise a big one taller than himself. If it sloped from him he would clamber up it, getting a footing with his goatskin shoes, and clinging with his hands to little uneven bits that stuck up from the surface of it. If such a rock sloped against him, shelving over him, then he had to find a way around it somehow. Often there was a long way to go before he could find room and footing to get by.

Now there was a dimness in the air and a cool breeze blew on him. This felt good to Marash, and he put forth more effort in the climb, making a leap sometimes from rock to rock.

Looking behind him now and then he saw the country widening out below, and to both sides of him there showed more valleys and more mountains as far as he could see. Now he could see over Skodra easily, and far beyond the Lake and its mountainy shore he caught a shining glimpse—rosy a little in the setting sun—water of the Adriatic Sea.

He stood a moment looking at this faint glimmering that touched the western sky. His heart beat faster for a second. Across that sea he knew was Italy. He'd seen Italian soldiers in the town. There was life different from the mountain life he knew.

"Beyond there," thought Marash, "are cities, bigger than Skodra, mile after mile of country, valleys and hills, and plains stretching three times as far as this plain of Skodra lying at my feet." Goats there must be, too, sheep and cows and horses. Motor cars, like those he saw in Skodra now and then carrying foreign people through the streets. And there the people's tongues spoke other words—he knew a few Italian words himself. Churches there were with steeples probably that reached up to the sky and boats that sailed on water—he'd seen them on the Lake—steamboats. And besides, more wonderful than all, sky-boats, that rode the air among the clouds, and maybe in the dark flew near the stars. "If I could fly now," thought Marash, "like that orange-winged hawk sailing up there I would go flying straight to Italy and see it all. And then I'd come back and I'd tell Palok, and Lul, and Zina all about it; and I'd tell it all to Bora, too, and to Rexh, and to Beiram down there, and to my cousin Nush." They all would wonder at the things he told, and their eyes would go wide open with surprise of it, as Bor's eyes had that day he'd told her about the things he'd read at school.

He turned and climbed a little higher, then looked up. Yes, the mountain top was near him now, close

against the sky, it seemed, and the highest knob of it showed redder than the rest and seemed to thrust itself up suddenly higher than ever.

"It calls me, that top peak of the Red Mountain," said Marash aloud, "it says, 'Come, Shala mountaineer, climb up to me, I am the very top of all the world.'" He laughed, and got his foot on the rock above him, climbing again.

His legs had felt tired; now with the top so near they felt rested, lively, eager to get up there. They took the big rocks strongly, reaching sure-footed as a goat from one great stone to another.

On he climbed.

Now the last effort came. Clambering on hands and knees he made the topmost peak, straddled it, holding tight, looking east over Shqyphenia.

With glee at reaching the last height he threw back his head and called out to the rocky waste about him, "Rrnoft! Rrnoft! Rrnoft!" This was his word, "hurrah." Three times he shouted it, and echoes of the shout went bounding down the mountainside, leaping, it seemed, from rock to rock, and crossing to the mountains opposite only to come back to his ears again in a dim roaring.

Marash drew himself carefully to his feet and balanced like a slim tree on the red rock.

"Now, to see the world," he said eagerly, scanning the country east and north and south. He could see a village, no, two villages, way down below him, the trace of a far trail, another group of houses—mountain homes farther away; and always where he looked to the sky's edge mountains ranged.

Northward the peaks were high, higher than where he stood. "The land of the Black Mountains," thought Marash. "I have not climbed half high enough, after all, I cannot see beyond them." His heart sank a little. The world was too big. "I cannot see even a glimpse of those great kingdoms that I read about."

He turned westward. Red sank the sun into the Adriatic.

"It is a great deal bigger than I thought—the world," he told himself, settling astride his rock as he had sat at first; "much bigger. Here I see only the edges of my own land, Shqypenia."

He sat still, watching how the darkness crept from the east as the light faded behind him.

Suddenly he felt hungry. Out of his belt he took the bread and figs, and ate, throwing the empty fig skins down the slope and wasting not a crumb of Beiram's cornbread. The hard red pomegranate and a tiny piece of bread he saved for morning.

The wind blew cooler.

Stars showed here and there.

Marash felt well filled. He climbed down off the rock.

"Now," he told himself, "I must find some good spot to spend the night until the sun comes back to warm me."

He noticed that the wind blew from the south. He wandered among the rocks. Two big ones stood close together, one jutting over at the top meeting the other. In between the two was room for a boy's body to curl up. Marash crept in and leveled the small rocks that floored the cave-like nook. Then spreading his woolen girdle low on his hips and high above his waist up to his armpits, he lay down and huddled himself up, drawing his knees up nearly to his chin.

Yes, the world was much too big to see it all at once, no matter where you climbed to. He yawned. But he had seen farther than he'd ever seen—more of the world than you could see from the neck above Shala valley. And he had climbed high—higher than those people sleeping in the villages below his peak. Tired, he was. His eyes closed. How cold the air was. Now he huddled up even closer, glad of the rock's protection from the wind. He was used to cold air and hard bedding. Soon he slept.



CHAPTER XX. THE SIGNAL FIRE

THE night hours passed.
What sound was that? Marash started awake, stared at the darkness, felt the rocky wall he lay against, tried to remember where he was and why. His mind was thick with dreaming.

On the Red Mountain, that was where he was. What was it that had waked him up so suddenly?

There was a sound—feet climbing over rocks—what feet? And what could it be at this late hour of the night climbing about?

Marash lay still. He held his breath, listening with all his might. Footsteps. Bears? Had Beiram been right, after all? His heart went galloping a minute. Then, another noise—voices this time, men's voices, speaking words he knew. He took a slow breath. Bears did not make such sounds—no, these were men, and mountain men, he knew the accent that they used. He raised himself up a little from his rocky bed. What were men doing way up here at night, where there was no village, nor a roof for shelter?

He listened, made out there were three of them or four perhaps, so many voices sounded, speaking together softly in the dark. He heard hard breathing, and then sounds like branches rubbing, then the crack of twigs. Marash thought, "There are no trees up here. How can they make such sounds?"

He crawled quietly to the open end of his shelter. Dimly he made out four forms against the sky, blotches of darkness. Two of the figures bore great loads on their backs. As Marash watched, straining his eyes to pierce the night, he saw these two lean over, drop their loads. And then he heard wood crack and rustle, branches that crushed each other. Yes, heaps of wood they were.

Marash crawled back and curled up in his hole again, the thoughts chasing fast after each other

through his head. Firewood they had brought. Firewood at night to a bare mountain where no houses were! Other men slept in houses while these four climbed the Red Mountain with their great loads, and now they whispered to each other on the top. What made them?

"Better to lie still and wait," thought Marash. "This is some serious business that they do, and if they hear from me movement or words they'll maybe take me for an enemy spying on them in the dark. No sense in that." He lay breathing as quietly as he could, not stirring.

He could hear the men, moving here and there, piling the wood, and speaking now and then. He heard a match struck, heard a sputtering flame. Suddenly light showed. They'd lit the pile. Marash knew as it grew brighter that the light would shine right into where he was. His cave faced that way, there was no escape, no way to hide. Better be found than give himself away. He held his breath, waiting, motionless.

The wood caught well and the flame flared higher, throwing a steady stream of light through the cave door onto Marash.

One of the men rose slowly, walking toward him.

"A boy," the man said, and then, "a mountain

boy." Marash sat up as well as he could in his rock shelter. He raised one hand, saluting, said in a firm voice, "Long life to you!" And then he smiled to make the man know that he spoke as a friend out of a good heart.

"Long life," the man responded. "Come out and show yourself."

Marash climbed out, standing very straight before the three other men full in the fire's light. He said again, "Long life!" Three times he said it, one for each of them. They answered.

By his clothing now they could tell to what tribe he belonged. Marash knew that. He hoped their tribes were friendly to his tribe. He studied what they wore. He recognized only one tribal dress among them, the one worn by the man that first had seen him. The tribe of this man was Merturi and that tribe lived not so far from Shala and were friends to Shala. Marash was familiar with the black designs of braiding on the trousers that this man wore. The other three also wore the white wool trousers of the mountaineers, but braided in unusual designs that Marash did not recognize at all. Where these men came from then he could not tell. Shqyptar they were, Sons of the Eagle, too, and mountaineers, but from a distant tribe unknown to him.

"Sit down, Son-of-Shala. What village is your village?" asked one of the strange men.

Marash sat down beside them. "Abate," he answered.

The Merturi man looked at the others, then he said, "This may mean luck for us."

"Who is your father?" asked one of the men.

"Palok, the son of Ded," replied Marash.

The man from Merturi said, "I know of him. A man with a white face." Marash knew he meant by this to praise Palok and let the others know that Marash's father was a good man and trustworthy.

The strange man spoke again, "The son's feet follow in the father's steps."

The man from Merturi said to Marash, "What do you here?"

Marash said, "I climbed at sunset to the top and I was sleeping till the sun should come again to show me the trail to Abate where I live."

The man rose and threw more wood on the huge fire. Then he came back and sat down close to Marash.

"Palok's son," he said, "if I should set your feet on the trail to Shala on a night like this could you follow that trail with only stars to guide you?"

"I know that trail," said Marash, "and could follow it to my house door though no star shone."

"Good," said the man, and "Good" echoed the other three who had been listening to every word that Marash and the other man had said.

Now the four men grouped themselves around Marash. The Merturi man looked seriously at him.

"What do they call you?" he asked.

"Marash."

"Marash, Son-of-Palok, you are a boy of the mountains, Son of the Mountain Eagle like ourselves; you speak the tongue we speak."

"Yes," Marash murmured, and the man went on: "Do you, Marash, love this land, these mountains that are ours?"

"I live here, I belong to it," said Marash, "it is part of me." He wondered at the question.

"We, too, belong to it," said the man gravely. "This land is truly ours, but there are those, men with black faces, who want to have our mountains for themselves. They have a country, but they want ours, too, and once they have it they will make us speak their language, not our own, but a strange tongue, words unfitting for the Eagle's Sons."

Marash's eyes flashed from one serious face to the

other. His heart beat fast. "They will never have it!" he exclaimed.

The man threw his head back, denying Marash's words. "They will," he said, "unless—" he looked at the three men and back to Marash—"unless we, every one of us, stand side by side to stop them."

"Shala, and Shoshi, and your tribe?" questioned Marash.

"Shala and Shoshi and Merturi," the man repeated, "and besides Nikai, and Krasnichi, Skreli and Thachi and Kilmeni—Castrati, and the border tribes—all, all of them. There must be no single tribe of all the Eagle's Land that stands outside this bond of brotherhood. And they must make this vow of brotherhood, this truce among themselves at once without delay!"

"This danger is near us, then?" asked Marash.

"Too near," answered the man, "too near for any tribe to waste itself in quarrels with another. There must be a 'bessa' among every tribe of us, a promise that until this danger's past all of the Eagle's Sons will act as friends—blood brothers side by side against our enemy."

"But how will there be time to let them know when danger is so near? How can you tell each tribe and every bairak in the tribe that these strange men

are coming in on us before they come? They will not make a peace among themselves unless they know of danger," Marash said, "and they will know too late." His eyes looked anxiously into the man's eyes.

The man turned his face away and pointed to the fire. The others faced it, too, and the man said, "That fire is a word that travels fast. As it burns now it is a signal light to people of the mountains facing it and all the valley villages between. They understand. A fire like this commands, 'Make peace among you; danger is at hand.'"

Marash's face felt hot, his heart was thumping furiously. Now he knew why in the night these quiet men had climbed the steep mountain, built their fire there. A signal fire! It could be seen from far, and where the people saw it they would themselves build other signal fires on other mountains that the tribes in other villages more distant yet might know the Eagle's Land stood in great danger, needed all her sons to stand as brothers facing it. So through the mountains would this word travel by the swift flame of fire—word like a flame itself—"Sons of the Eagle, stand!"

Marash caught his breath, then he said, "The people in my valley cannot see this fire here. How will they know?"

The man said, "You say you know the trail back to your village even in darkness. To-night are stars. Will you go there and bear this message to your tribe and tell Palok, your father, fires must be built to make the tribes beyond your tribe know of this danger? And you will tell him, too, that there is need for truce through all the mountains, a pledged word of peace between the bitterest enemies, the tribal besa. Will you do this, Marash?"

"Yes, on my word, I will," cried Marash, springing to his feet and standing straight and tall before the men.

They all rose, too. "Good, we will give our messages to you, the names of all the tribes that must be warned, and we will set you on the trail ourselves and you shall travel through the night as fast as two feet can carry you, so that the sun before it reaches noon to-morrow will see you at your house bearing this word to Shala."

"Tell me the message," said Marash, "and I will start."

Then the man told him names of tribes, and the places where the fires must be built. "Can you remember all of these things, Marash?" he asked him at the end.

Marash said, "I know a way to make remembering

sure—to write these words, mark them all down on paper, then this paper I will carry with me to Palok.”

“Write?” said the man. “No one of us can write.”

“I can,” said Marash.

“You—you can write? Are you then a friar or a priest?” exclaimed the man.

“Neither,” said Marash, “but I have learned writing at the Friar’s school in Thethi.”

The four men murmured to each other in surprise.

Marash stood thinking for a minute, then he said, “You carry papers for your cigarettes?” The man made “yes” with a sidewise movement of his head. The others reached for their tobacco boxes, and offered to Marash the little white papers bought in the bazaar. He took some. Then he got a charred twig from the fire. He tried it on his hand, then rubbed the soft charcoal end of it into a point. “This is my pencil.” He sat down on the ground in the light of the fire, setting a flat stone under his paper for a desk to write on. “Now,” he said, “I’m ready. Tell me again the names, and tell them slowly.”

The four men crowded round him and the leader, the Merturi man, went over all the names of tribes and mountains that he had told Marash before. He waited after each one until he saw that Marash had finished his charcoal markings for the words.

It was slow work, the papers tore sometimes and the burned stick would break and smear the letters. Marash worked hard and eagerly, sounding out the words until he had a dozen of the little sheets marked plainly. Then he threw his pencil down and asked the men for cloth to wrap the papers in. One of the men cut off a bit of cloth from a sort of kerchief he had tied about his cap. Marash folded it around his papers carefully and put them in his blouse under the banding of his girdle close to his skin.

"Now I am ready, men," he said, standing before them.

The leader chose a man to take the trail with him and Marash. The other two would stay and keep the fire burning. Good-byes were said.

The leader said to Marash, "My legs are longer legs than yours, and I will lend them to you for a while until we reach the trail leading to Shala." He hoisted Marash up astride his shoulders. "Hold to my head," he said, "and I will keep firm hold on each of your ankles." Marash held on and the man started off. The other followed. Down the slope they went on the east side of the peak. Marash moved his body, balancing as the man strode over the rocky ground. He seemed to know a quick and easy way to go and he walked fast.

Barely an hour of this rapid going and they came to the trail that led to Shala. The man set Marash on the ground. "Here is your path," he said. "Good-bye, good luck. Fortune be with you. You know the way now surely?"

"As the sheep knows the way to the drinking pool," said Marash, starting off.

"Go on a smooth trail," called the men after him. "Long life to you, Marash, Son-of-Palok!"

"Peace to you, and long life," called back Marash, taking the familiar trail at a jog-trot that time should not be lost.

He heard the men's steps die away in the distance. He was alone, dark night about him, and the sky set with bright stars. He trotted on.

He must go fast and surely on this trail, nothing must stop him. In his belt—his hand went to the place—he carried words that would mean safety to his land, his mountains. He looked up to where the night sky touched the peaks about him. Range on range. Only that afternoon he'd seen a thousand mountains from his mountain peak, stretched all about him, far as he could see. He thought of all the villages like his set here and there among the hills, villages and bairaks of the tribes, his own, and Nikai, Shoshi, all the rest, friends some of them and

some sworn enemies. From to-morrow there would go a flaming word among them to make peace, the mountain truce no man would break no matter if his deadliest enemy should pass him on the trail.

Marash hardly noticed where his swift feet fell, his head was so busy with his thoughts.

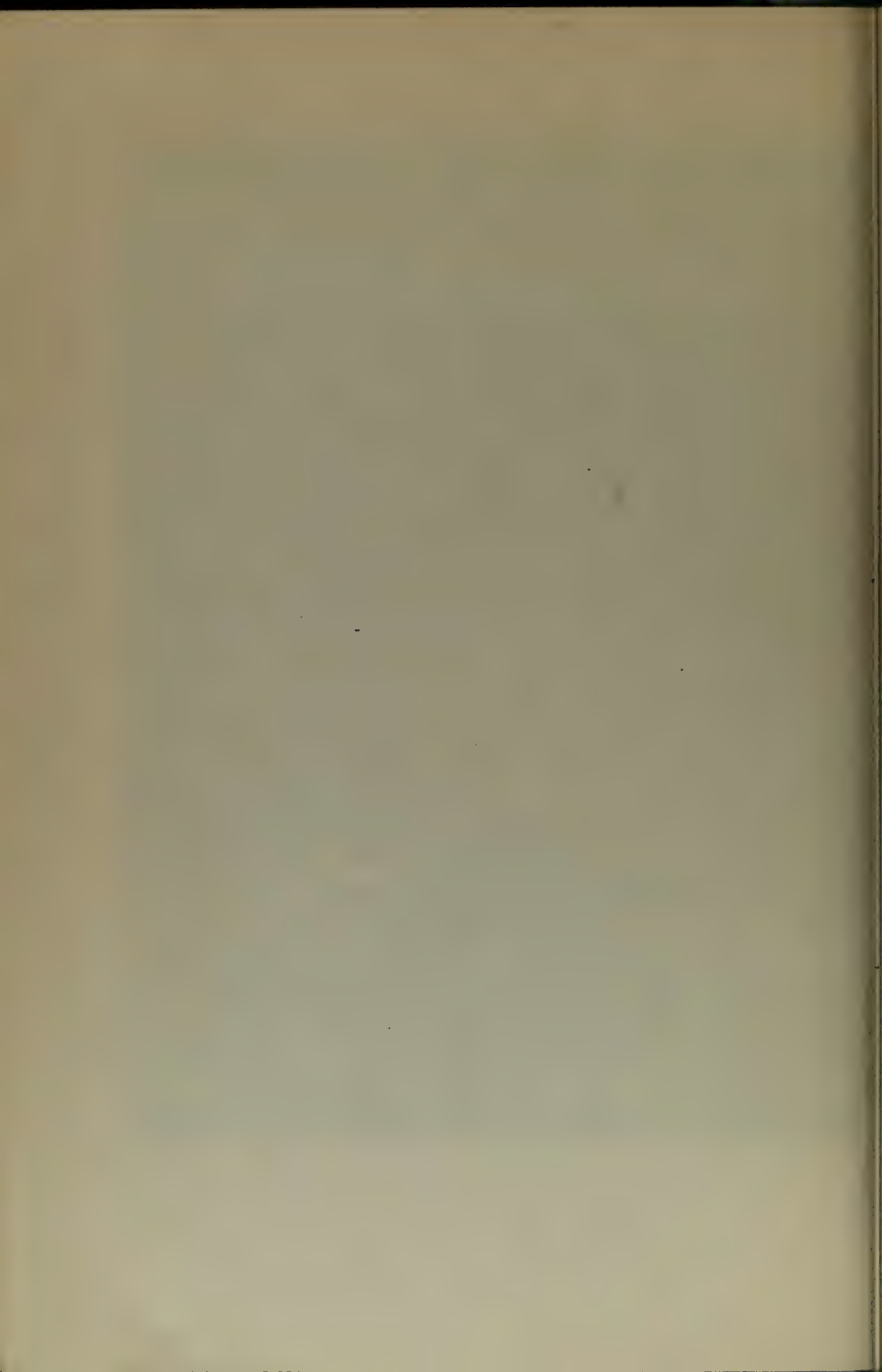
It was right that they should act as brothers to each other, all these mountain tribes. Sons of the Eagle they were—all of them; tribe brothers then in Shqypenia, the biggest tribe of all. One blood was in them, one language on their tongues, and one law over all of them, Lek's Law, that ancient ruler of the mountains ages back.

He patted the little package in his belt. He carried here the word to make the mountain people know their brotherhood, and a word of danger coming that they must guard against together. Each step he took made safety surer for them, his people, for his land, these mountains. He would go fast, fast that safety and this besa might begin. He ran.

The east showed red. Then the sun came and Marash stopped to rest a short while by a stream, and drink, and eat his bit of bread and open the shell-like skin of his pomegranate. He crunched the hard seeds, sucking in the juiciness that held them and that dripped out, staining his hands bright red.



THE SIGNAL FIRE



After the food he went on faster yet, mile after rocky mile, while the sun climbed. How hot it was! A long time went by. Still his feet fell steadily on the trail.

Soon he would get to Shala, to his village. He went on now more slowly, for he felt tired a little. Then he saw from afar his own house and made out Palok standing beside the door. Forgetting weariness he broke into a run and hurried up the sloping way toward home. He called an eager greeting to his father.

Palok said, "Greetings to you, my son. You carry news. I see it in your face."

Marash, panting, sat down beside him on the stone doorstep.

All that had happened yesterday he told and then drew out of its safe place inside his clothes the bundle of little papers marked with the message. He undid the cloth and from each slip he read the words out slowly to Palok. His father, frowning a little, listened intently, saying each word after Marash.

When he had read the last paper Palok said, "This word you bring is warning in time for us and so means safety. I will take your message to the bair-aktor and he will give orders for the fires to-night.

Go, eat and rest. Your work has been done well. Shala is glad, and all the mountains, yes, the Eagle's Land itself, gives thanks to you to-day."

A pride and gladness surged up in Marash as he looked at Palok. "My heart is satisfied," he said.

Palok walked off and Marash went into the house.

His mother welcomed him and brought him water for his hands. "Here, eat," she said, and set before him pork and bread. Then she sat down beside him while he ate. Pren brought him salt, and Lul came up and snuggled next to him, saying his name.

Zina said then, "You were a long time on the trail from Skodra."

"I climbed the Red Mountain to the top," said Marash.

His mother's eyes showed surprise.

"From there about the fourth hour of darkness I set out to carry to our tribes a message that should mean safety to them and peace, a besa through all the mountains."

"Safety and peace," said Zina. "Those are great words."

Marash ate slowly, thinking many thoughts. "Great words," he said, half to himself, "and to-night the fire carries them through all the land."

He remembered how the world had looked to him up there on the red peak at sunset. He thought, "The mountains hear these words that I have carried, but, beyond the mountains, south by Skodra, other people live. They, too, are called the Eagle's Sons; they speak as we do who are mountaineers. Brothers they are, these men, to us the mountain men." Part of that greater tribe he'd thought about—the tribe that was Shqypenia. Would they hear, too, these two great words of peace and safety? He wondered.

He finished eating and took off his girdle and his socks and moccasins. Then he stretched out on the blanket Pren had laid down for him. He would sleep now and next day Bor should hear about it all.

He lay with eyes half closed, seeing the fire through them like blurred streaks of reddish light. The world somehow seemed bigger than it ever had before. Even outside this family of tribes, Shqypenia, were other men with other laws, and customs different from his own, and other words for saying the same things. Perhaps there was a tribe bigger than any he had thought of yet, a tribe that took in all the different men in the whole world—the men of Italy, of Greece, of Serbia even, and all the kingdoms of

Europe and far-off America. Would they, too, somehow hear these words that he had carried? He was half dreaming, hardly following where his own thoughts led. "Great words," he murmured, as he dropped off to sleep, "great words—carried by fire!"



